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FOUR STUDIES
OF LOVE



A. W. DUBOURG.



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FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE.

I.

"

“‘Shepherd, what is love? I pray thee tell!’—
‘It is that fountain, and that well,
Where pleasure and repentance dwell;
It is, perhaps, that passing bell
That tolls us all to heaven or hell;
And this is love, as I heard tell.’”

SIR WALTER RALEIGH.

FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE.

BY A. W. DUBOURG,

JOINT AUTHOR OF THE COMEDY, "NEW MEN AND OLD ACRES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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251. 1

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TO MY UNCLE,
GEORGE DUBOURG,

(AUTHOR OF "THE VIOLIN," ETC.)

THESE FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE,
(ALL OF THEM CONCEIVED, AND THREE OF THEM FIRST WRITTEN,
IN DRAMATIC FORM,)

Are Dedicated

WITH FEELINGS OF SINCERE REGARD.

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(AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.)

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A

I.

SAVED BY LOVE.

(AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.)

B

AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.



CHAPTER I.

MISS LINDSAY THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

SOME said the ship had weathered the storm and arrived safely in port ; others said that an aged pilgrim had crossed Jordan. These persons dealt largely in metaphor, and dwelt at or about Dulwich, in which locality Jacob Vaughan had himself resided. Some said simply old Jacob's dead ; what the deuce is he worth ? These persons lived by day in the City, returning to late dinner at Dulwich ; certain of them became metaphorical after dinner—indeed, from after dinner on Saturday until the following Monday morn-

ing, when they returned to simple language in the City, their wives and families remaining at Dulwich and retaining the use of metaphor throughout the week. Betwixt Vaughan's death and his funeral two questions were warmly debated in the neighbourhood—saving grace and probate value, and, incidental of course to probate value, the question of the destination of the property.

Certain metaphorical persons—they were chiefly ladies, the husbands being absent in the City—offered balm of comfort to Mrs. Corley, who was the sister of the deceased; they talked a great deal about resignation founded upon faith, and they also referred frequently to the passage of the Jordan. But Mrs. Corley was inconsolable, for while they thus talked she was thinking wistfully on the destination of the property. Had that point been decided in her favour, she would have been able to accept with Christian meekness the monitions to a pious resignation; she had, however, most unfortunately

been for some few years on bad terms with her rich brother, and really the two questions got so intermingled in her head, that whether people talked of grace, or probate, or next of kin, or Jordan, the result was unmitigated sorrow.

As for Mr. Corley, he had been for many years a waiter upon fortune. He was "something in the City," a profession which afforded him a reasonable competence, but not affluence. Metaphorical as was his habit at Dulwich, he was accustomed to use the simplest language in the City. "It's a d—d bad business!" he said to a sympathetic friend who addressed him on the question of probate value; "I'm not even asked to the funeral."

Two of the greatest difficulties of a man's life, or, more strictly speaking, of a man's existence *upon* this earth, having regard to those persons who are anxious to avoid giving offence to friends and neighbours, are dinner-parties and funerals. To both of these functions is attached the necessity

of selection, with the heartburning consequences of invidious distinction. It is, indeed, possible to avoid the dilemma in the case of dinner-parties, by simply not giving dinners; but burial is inevitable, and the friendships of a life have often been shattered by a funeral.

Not that the late Mr. Vaughan cared about giving offence here and there—(of course, being dead, he ought to be alluded to in the past tense). It is difficult to realize the fact of a man being dead when his *volition* lives, and acts, and re-acts, and moulds the lives of others, through the power of his will—"being dead, he yet speaketh," in the parchment voice of probate. And what was the offence which had estranged Jacob Vaughan from his family? It was true that he was wayward and ungenerous by nature, of a mean and narrow spirit; but these things are easily forgiven in the possessor of wealth. He had erred in the one offence for which there was no forgiveness in the mean, narrow, selfish natures

that surrounded him ;—he had married late in life.

The fire of Jacob's youth had been burnt out in the counting-house ; a smouldering fire, never a bright generous flame, the counting-house had sufficed for its feeding ; money-getting was the meat and drink of his soul. At last the term of his partnership expired ; it was intimated to him by his partners that the time for his retirement had arrived. He prayed earnestly, with tears even, for a renewal of the partnership at any cost ; but young men were ready to step into his shoes. The partners were inexorable, and Jacob balanced the dearly-loved ledgers for the last time, and closed them with a heavy heart, and then he was thrust out into the cold, hard world, an old man, to begin life once more, with pockets full of gold. Poor old man ! all the temptations of life around him, and only senility to urge as an excuse for folly.

He tried the innocent, but costly, amusement of water-colour drawings, with some

success at first—not that he cared one jot for foregrounds, or middle distances, or sky effects—the dealer's assertion of value was beauty enough for him, and the emulation of acquisition and possession afforded the excitement he required. The passion, however, did not last very long. He lacked dash and boldness in his buying—the picture-dealers alarmed him with their prices; other connoisseurs, with equal ignorance but greater nerve, carried off the prizes of the annual exhibitions; and at last he gave up the fine modern art of buying pictures, in disgust.

He tried other pursuits with indifferent success, and at last, as a final expedient, he married. His sister, Mrs. Corley, possessed among other household drudges a governess, a young lady of about twenty-four—interesting rather than absolutely handsome, with elegant, refined manners, which, in their very unobtrusiveness, stood forth in marked contrast with the *brusquerie* of Mrs. Corley. That lady's tyranny towards

her servants was tempered by a wholesome amount of fear, but with regard to Miss Mabel Smith, tyranny had full swing, for governesses are more plentiful than cooks, and therefore more easily replaced. The girl meekly endured her slavery, because her parents and a sick sister lived hard by in a small cottage, supported partly by her scanty wages; and, through the grudging grace of Mrs. Corley, she was permitted once or twice during the week to visit her parents and the invalid and cheer them by her presence.

It is a difficult matter to inflate a withered heart with love, but the blind god was equal to the occasion. Jacob had always been fond in a carking spirit of running counter to his sister, and because she tyrannized over the governess, he sided with the oppressed out of pure nagging opposition. It was not a very hopeful seed for eventual growth into love and marriage. Love, however, cheerfully made the best of it, and fostered the sprouting shoot to good

purpose. The thought of Mabel Smith gradually took root in Jacob's mind. There was something very fascinating in the idea of tyranny. His sister ruled the pleasant, elegant-looking girl with a rod of iron—the girl quailed before her. Why should he not possess a slave who would bend, if he so chose it, to his will? And then there was something indescribably alluring in the girl's tears—so love conquered Jacob. Mabel was wholly innocent of all suspicion as to Mr. Vaughan's passion; but Mrs. Corley possessed quick, suspicious eyes. Without more ado, Mabel was summoned to a special interview with her mistress. Mrs. Corley was very angry, and not at all logical; the girl's duplicity was first ruthlessly denounced, and ignorance of offence being pleaded as a rejoinder, an accusation of falsehood and prevarication followed, and finally the head and front of the offence was disclosed—an insidious attempt to win the heart and hand of Mr. Jacob Vaughan. Anxious as Mabel was to

retain her situation for the sake of those at home, she could scarcely resist bursting into a laugh, so entirely preposterous did the idea appear. Her suppressed laugh was fatal. Branded as a heartless adventuress, she was turned out of Mrs. Corley's house, and that lady resolved from thenceforth, or at least during Jacob's lifetime, that no home governess should be harboured in her family circle. Of course, after Jacob's decease the question of home tuition might be viewed in other lights.

On the other hand, at the cottage, although they kept silence on the subject, the idea of a rich husband did not seem so *very* preposterous to Mabel's parents and sister. A rich husband for Mabel meant many comforts which are almost necessities for invalids; it meant, for instance, the south coast of England, which the doctors had one and all recommended for the sick girl who lay, day by weary day, on a sofa in a small cheerless room. Mabel's father, too, had seen better days, and ill health had

incapacitated him from all active work. When Mabel thought these things over she shuddered.

Ah ! a pleasant bright villa at Torquay ; comforts and luxuries now impossible for her to afford out of her scanty purse ; the best medical advice, without stint ; better and more nourishing food, better wine—*all* at the cost of her hand. The first night of her return home she lay awake thinking of these things, while her sister slept, breathing uneasily, at her side ; and she wept bitterly, for she loved a young man who was far away, yet ever present in her heart. But Mabel throughout her life had been so accustomed to think of others, that it always seemed wickedness to her to think of herself.

Jacob Vaughan paid a visit to the cottage and “took stock,” as he termed it, of the family affairs. In his selfish thoughts he quickly perceived the chains by which he might bind this noble girl, and make her his abject slave. An old man—but in the

strength of her love for her parents and sister, he felt that he might safely defy all younger rivals as well before as after marriage—that he might rule and govern her young life at his will. Mother, father, and sister all declared, with tears in their eyes, that Mabel had been the most loving and devoted daughter and sister from her childhood—ever unselfish and self-denying. Jacob was well pleased with this assurance ; it was evident to him that at the small cost of, say, some three or four hundred a year, this fair woman could be made as securely his as if she were immured in a strong tower guarded by a thousand guards.

He spoke fairly enough, did Jacob ; he made his offer without much preface or ado. She sat and trembled as he addressed his suit to her. “I’m not a young man,” said he, taking a seat at her side after the avowal had been made. “I can’t exactly expect you to love me as you would love a younger man, but still you may love an old man for his good heart. I mean to be very kind and

good to you"—he took her reluctant hand—"aye, and to *them* also," he added, and her hand lay without resistance in his. Thus emboldened, his arm stole round her waist. She started up almost with a shriek, for she had sworn that no man's arm, save *his* arm who was far away, should ever clasp her waist; and then the thought of that last interview flashed into her mind when she had parted from *him* and broken off their hopeless engagement, though she had herself sworn in her own soul, then and there, to be ever true and faithful; and fiery words of rebuke rose on her lips, and anger and indignation gathered in her eyes. And then Jacob talked of that villa at Torquay, and of the many comforts he could and would afford for parents and invalid, and so the fiery words died away, and anger and indignation turned into tears, and with all submissiveness, but with beating heart, she let him hold her in his arms; and thus talking, he was presently venturesome enough to kiss her lips. She wrenched

herself from his grasp, and with a cry of agony hurried out of the room, leaving him utterly dumbfounded.

It was a very small house. Oh, for some place of intense solitude, far away, buried in distant hills, where she, and shame, and despair, could be alone together! She flew to the little room she shared with her sister. Her sister was in the ordinary sitting-room, reclining, as was her wont, with Christian resignation and meek endurance, on the sofa. She locked the door, and fell sobbing on the bed. "Oh, my God," she cried in her agony, "have mercy—not this horror, not this degradation—save me from this loathsome life." She did not dare to cry very loudly—even in this hour of agony she retained her thoughtfulness for others. The partitions were very thin; so she buried her face deep in the pillow, and stifled her sobs, and terrible thoughts of abhorrence racked her pure and maidenly heart. But the duty of self-sacrifice on behalf of her afflicted sister and her father

had been taught her thoroughly well, and this lesson, earliest of all lessons, was so inwoven into her character, that it retained its virtue even in these supreme moments of despair. "God," they had taught her, "had made her strong, and well, and healthy, and it was for her to bear the cross her sister could not carry;—her afflicted sister, who was forced to remain, by the mercy of Heaven's all-wise and beneficent ruling, a prisoner to her bed and sofa."

Mabel prayed that she might die rather than endure the shame of such a marriage; but she quickly remembered that she must not die, that she had no business to think of death; that life, not death, was her business—life lived for the sake of taking care of those at home. At last the sobs died away, and sharp agony became a dull aching. She had felt nearly as much pain ere this, when she had given up, and prudently and wisely too, the young lover she still loved. After a time she bathed her red eyes, and

arranged her disordered hair, and went quietly downstairs, and busied herself in making a custard pudding for her sister, who loved dear Mabel's puddings so much, or rather as much as she could like any edible thing, and Mabel baked it deftly too.

"Good Mabel, dear Mabel, precious Mabel," cried the invalid gleefully, when Mabel carried in the pudding baked to a very turn, as custard pudding must be baked, and she kissed Mabel with her thin pain-drawn lips, and looked so bright, and pleased, and grateful. Neither father, nor mother, nor invalid alluded directly to the offer. They had learned by experience the policy of leaving Mabel alone with her well-trained conscience. They talked, however, a good deal about Providence, and they thought a great deal about themselves.

Every one loved the poor invalid: she was so very patient, and uncomplaining, and resigned. The metaphorical persons held her in deep love and reverence; they would come and sit with her, and sym-

pathize with her, and ask her test questions as to the state of her soul, and her replies were always very edifying—a sweetness as of frankincense and myrrh, and a great richness of godly savour ; it was indeed esteemed by many to be a very precious privilege to listen to her words, and assist at the unveiling of her soul. Yes, she knew she was the very greatest of all sinners ; that her crimes were of the very blackest dye. Aye, they assented readily. But did she possess faith ? they inquired anxiously. Yes, she would reply meekly, with upraised eyes. But not in works ? they rejoined in still greater anxiety. No, not in works, she would answer firmly ; Heaven forbid ! grace, saving grace, was her only faith. It was very affecting, and people often cried. Some ladies said to her mother, as they left the room, lingering awhile in the little passage, “ Dear Mrs. Smith, be sure that little parlour of yours is an ante-chamber to heaven.” These ladies usually left tracts behind them, and they sometimes sent

jelly, although jelly in its nature savours of works.

As for Mabel, she didn't feel all her sister felt, and she used in early days to cry at the thought of her own inherent depravity. Indeed, as a young girl she had often prayed to be afflicted in the manner of her sister, and forced to recline upon a sofa, and enjoy all the spiritual blessings of faith.

One day, shortly after Jacob's offer had been accepted, and a great scandal had been created thereby, a lady, who had recently taken a house in the neighbourhood, and who was reputed to be soundly metaphorical, paid a visit to the Smiths' cottage.

Metaphor possesses the faculty of enabling people to enter the houses of others upon the slenderest introductions ; and Miss Lindsay, the lady in question, a spinster of a certain age, jerked herself suddenly into the invalid's presence with very little preliminary ceremony.

"This is my poor afflicted one," said Mrs. Smith, pointing to her daughter on the sofa.

"Good morning," responded Miss Lindsay mechanically, for her eyes were engaged in surveying the room.

"I have two invalids to think of," continued Mrs. Smith, mournfully. "My husband is far from enjoying the blessings of health."

"Can't work," rejoined the visitor in an unsympathetic tone.

"He is, I am sorry to say, incapacitated from taking an active part in the duties of life."

"Don't earn money, eh?"

"No, alas! the doctors forbid all physical exertion. Of course, our means are very much narrowed."

"Of course they are," rejoined Miss Lindsay. "Where's your other girl?"

"My daughter Mabel is giving a lesson," responded Mrs. Smith, with some hesitation (the fact was that Mrs. Smith was almost ashamed of mentioning Mabel's name, so greatly had the good people around been horrified by the proposed marriage). "Mabel

has always been a good girl," continued Mrs. Smith apologetically, "whatever persons may choose to say about her—most devoted to her parents and her sister."

"I don't doubt it, ma'am," answered Miss Lindsay; "I came here to see her. Good morning;" and Miss Lindsay rose to depart.

"Won't you say a few words to poor Mary?" asked Mrs. Smith, amazed by Miss Lindsay's want of conformity to metaphorical usage.

"Haven't time, ma'am; I only deal with sinners."

"But the blessed unction that was poured down Aaron's beard," pleaded Mrs. Smith.

"Unction? fiddlesticks!" ejaculated Miss Lindsay, and she suddenly opened a wallet bag at her side, which contained a large assortment of tracts, classified into bundles of convenient size by elastic bands. Selecting one of these publications, she jerked it with an action similar to that of dealing cards, to the invalid, and with a repetition of "good morning," left the room.

Mrs. Smith had never experienced such behaviour in her life, and—the meek of soul are often stout holders by dignity—she snatched up the tract, read the title, “Stiff Collars; or, Don’t be Stuck up,” with indignation, and pursued the visitor into the passage.

“Oh, ma’am, not this,” she cried; “my sweet child is full of meekness and humility—she don’t require this.”

“Don’t she?” retorted Miss Lindsay, abruptly ending all discussion by slamming the house door. Whether the words, “Don’t she” signified a query or conveyed a sarcastic rebuke, Mrs. Smith could not quite determine; but she returned to her daughter in a state of great exasperation.

“Don’t fret, mother dear,” said the invalid, sweetly. “Let us endure all things to the end, knowing withal that our faith has a sure foundation,” and Mrs. Smith, with tears in her eyes, kissed her daughter’s forehead.

It so chanced that Miss Lindsay encoun-

tered Mabel Smith close to her own residence.

"You're Mabel Smith,—I'm Miss Lindsay," exclaimed that lady, by way of introduction. "I want to talk to you—come in." Miss Lindsay was accustomed to speak in a tone of authority, and she led Mabel, who was of course well aware of Miss Lindsay's theological standing in the neighbourhood, into her house. When they had entered the sitting-room, Miss Lindsay closed the door.

"Take notice," she began, abruptly, after scrutinizing Mabel from head to foot, "that I don't affect the graces of society; I always say what I feel. Most people tell lies, and are therefore sugary on the surface. My sugar, if I have any, is all underneath, and requires patience before you get a taste. Now to business. Mrs. Corley says you are a wicked, insidious, designing girl."

"Madam," exclaimed Mabel, indignantly.

"Hush! don't make a noise," continued Miss Lindsay, with authoritative manner.

"That's what Mrs. Corley says, and all her friends. Now, mark me—I hate kissing as a rule, but I'm going to kiss you;" and Miss Lindsay suddenly kissed Mabel, to Mabel's great astonishment. "There, that's a proof of what I think about you—it's an honest woman's kiss, not one of your Judas's kisses. So you're going to marry a man you don't care twopence for."

"Really, madam," protested Mabel, blushing.

"Don't prevaricate," retorted Miss Lindsay. "Not twopence. What woman could? When I heard the story, I said to myself, 'This girl is either very bad or very good.' I love bad people—the worse they are, the better I love 'em, because I delight in conversion—and I love good people from their great rarity, just as I love a glass of very old port, when I get it. There's goodness and goodness, mind you, and I hate *that* sort of goodness, because you can't convert it; and yet it wants conversion badly enough. Well, I was very curious to see you. I went to your home——"

"What did they say about me?" asked Mabel, nervously.

"Little enough, but it was enough for me. Bless you, my eyes are trained to see the truth through brick walls. I *saw* you were a good girl, and I cried from the time I left your house till I met you here."

"Why, Miss Lindsay?" asked Mabel, in astonishment.

"Because I've got a heart," answered Miss Lindsay, briefly. "You'll want a deal of prayer, my girl, to help you through with it—a husband like that. I know it's plaguy hard to pray with a heavy heart. I know it has pleased the Almighty—I can't tell why, but that's not our business—to isolate you in this affair from all help at the hands of those who should help. Come to me—I'm sent to help you. Depend upon it, He thought it was too heavy a burden for you to be left quite alone without any human love for support. It's your right to come to me, remember. Walk straight into this room, and say, 'Margaret Lindsay, I

want you.' It will be my bounden duty to obey the call."

When Miss Lindsay's voice lost its asperity it became very sweet. In an instant it touched Mabel's heart, and she burst into tears. "Bless you," she murmured, and she sank down at Miss Lindsay's feet. "I think sometimes it will kill me," she muttered, speaking her own thoughts rather than directly addressing Miss Lindsay. "When I think what *he* will say and feel, I almost go mad; the thoughts are always worse at night, and I daren't cry for fear of disturbing poor Mary."

"Who is *he*?" asked Miss Lindsay, going bluntly to the point.

"The man I love," answered Mabel.

"Where is *he*?"

"Far away—a civil engineer—Tiflis. It's all broken off now—we are both quite free; only I'm not free, I never can be free, because I love him. What will he think of me," she sobbed, "when he hears of this marriage?"

“What do they say about this at home?” inquired Miss Lindsay.

“They know the engagement is broken off. It was a foolish boy-and-girl engagement, they always said. It was a foolish engagement, I know,” she added, mournfully, “for he had nothing—only, God knows, it was true love.”

“Alas! I feared all this,” said Miss Lindsay, with tears in her eyes.

“Sometimes—sometimes—” cried Mabel, and she hesitated.

“Sometimes, my child?” inquired Miss Lindsay.

“No, no—impossible!” exclaimed Mabel, leaving the broken sentence unfinished. “He’s taken a villa for them at Torquay, a lovely sea-view. They are so pleased at the idea—the very thought of it has made Mary better already. We’ve been to choose the chintz this morning, he and I; and he’s ordered a new invalid couch for Mary, and——” In a fresh burst of grief she clung convulsively to Miss Lindsay. “Bless

you, dear lady, for seeking me—for letting me have my cry out at your house;—it would vex them so at home—I daren't cry there. I must do it—I must do it!" she added, with rapid utterance; "if I don't kill myself before that accursed wedding day," and she buried her face in Miss Lindsay's lap. "You are a woman," she gasped, in painful voice; "you can guess what I feel—how my whole womanhood revolts at the thought."

Not a word did Miss Lindsay vouchsafe; she let the girl cling to her, and she made shift to open her wallet with all its stores of faith, and admonition, and consolation; her fingers ran over the little bundles with that sensitive knowledge with which fingers run over the keys of a piano. Three or four times did her fingers thus run, and each time with greater hesitation. At length, with a deep sigh, she closed the wallet, for the first time in her life, without withdrawing a tract. Miss Lindsay never spoke unless she had some definite thing

to say. She remained silent until the girl had ceased sobbing, and when Mabel raised her face, Miss Lindsay kissed her. There seemed to be some soothing comfort in the kiss, and Mabel rose to her feet.

"It's past five," she exclaimed, anxiously. "Mary's tea, and she can't bear the girl's thick toast. Bless you for all the good you've done to me!" she cried, as she kissed Miss Lindsay with a heartfelt kiss.

"Remember, you're to walk in," answered Miss Lindsay, "just as you are, bonnet or not, fine dress or scrubby, and say, 'Margaret Lindsay, I want you.' Good-bye," and Mabel hurried away.

"Beaten," exclaimed Miss Lindsay, with sorrow and mortification, as soon as she was alone. She sat a while reflecting. "Dumb, too, when I had great need to speak! This is your doing, hey!" and she leaned her elbows on the table, and bent forward as if in the act of addressing some one on the opposite side. "You were here, were you? and in this room, too, you scoundrel! I

thought, as I walked up the road, that you must be at the bottom of the mischief, or Margaret Lindsay would not have been set to look after this girl. It's no use, I tell you," she continued, tauntingly, and her face wore an expression of ineffable contempt. "Margaret Lindsay's got the girl, recollect—you've had many a hard tussle with Margaret—Margaret's going to keep watch over that girl's soul. You'd best be off, I say"—Miss Lindsay shook her bonnet defiantly—"you contemptible hound! I've got the sharp sword and the buckler. Avaunt, I say, or you'll get the worst of it!" and Miss Lindsay rose from her chair, and turned her back on her invisible adversary with contempt.

"Is it too late for this week's 'Brazen Vessel,' I wonder? No, Wednesday evening for insertion in Saturday's edition. Not a moment to be lost, though," and Miss Lindsay returned to the table and seized pen and paper with energy. "Urgent," she headed her note to the editor of the

"Vessel." "Earnest prayer is anxiously asked on behalf of a young girl who is obliged, through pressure of family affairs, to enter into the holy state of matrimony with an old man." She folded up the note and addressed the envelope. "Pooh!" she exclaimed derisively, "you may sneer and snigger over my shoulder as much as ever you like; but I shall pray hard for her myself up to Saturday afternoon. The first edition of the 'Vessel' catches the early morning trains to the country. They'll be hard at prayer by Saturday evening throughout England; Glasgow will get it by the last train. You don't like Scotch prayer, do you? It's so stout and strong—full in the mouth, hey? Let Glasgow once set to praying, and your chance of harming that girl isn't worth twopence. Ah! I knew the mere mention of Glasgow would drive you out," and Miss Lindsay started up. "Harm her if you dare!" she cried defiantly, by way of a parting shot at her routed foe.

Whatever form it took, Miss Lindsay's love was at least no dead thing. It went and *lived* in the heart of Mabel Smith.

There were many beautiful and touching episodes, deeply edifying withal, connected with Mabel's marriage. Not that very much interest was felt in the bride; the great interest of the occasion centered in the invalid. Jacob had resolved to do the thing "handsome," and do it he did. The *trousseau* was exhibited in the little parlour, and many metaphorical ladies attended to see the sight. They also contributed their little offerings,—chiefly "Bogatzky's Golden Treasury," of which a large store gradually accumulated. The lovely wedding dress, rich white corded silk, with Honiton lace veil and trimmings, rested, with due muslin coverings, of course, on the high-backed school chair which used to rack poor Mabel's back, strong and healthy as it was, when she was a child. This chair and its precious burden stood close to Mary's couch. The travelling dress, also, rich brown silk

with full velvet trimmings, was on view, and other dresses—dinner, not ball, of course, which would have been carnal. Then there was a lovely dressing-case, with engine-turned silver tops, engraved "M. V." as a monogram; a costly massive bracelet, and other expensive jewels.

Oh, but to see the poor invalid look so bright and cheerful, that was indeed the lovely edifying sight. Mabel, on the contrary, was suffering from a bad headache—at least that was the excuse Mrs. Smith offered for her absence; she had, in fact, locked herself into the little room upstairs, and she lay grovelling on the floor, with the buzz of voices below her, fighting hopelessly with the horror that filled her soul.

"And does not poor dear Mary repine," whispered the metaphorical ladies, with tender concern, to Mrs. Smith, "when she sees all these creatures of dross and earthly vanity, which contrast so sadly with her poor afflicted state?"

"Oh no," answered Mrs. Smith, with a

mother's pride, and yet with tears in her eyes. "Ask the blessed one what she feels."

They asked her :

"Do not these carnal things," they said (they mostly wore sealskin jackets, and some of the jackets were trimmed with real sable), "do not these carnal things make you repine and fret at your sad earthly lot?"

"Oh no," replied the invalid with cheerful alacrity. "I rejoice in these poor worldly things for dear Mabel's sake. I love to look at them because they are for her happiness; but as for me, I have a casket of precious jewels."

"The pearl without price?" asked the ladies anxiously. (Many of them possessed diamonds for evening wear, and they wore them.)

"Yes," answered the invalid. "I humbly trust that I do possess that priceless jewel;" and her countenance beamed with joyful expression, but the ladies and Mrs. Smith averted their faces to conceal their tears.

The crowning sweetness of all was the demeanour of the invalid throughout the wedding-day. So cheerful, and yet so soberly and religiously cheerful, and, at the same time, so wonderfully resigned. Mabel looked very handsome, it is true, and the wedding dress became her well, but her countenance was hard and stony, and her eyes were almost disfigured by a fixed cold stare. She went through the religious ceremony like a sleepwalker. Bystanders said she evidently had no heart—a worldly, mercenary girl, to have accepted such a match, and her character was written clearly enough in her face.

Of course Miss Lindsay had not been asked to the wedding; she did not even attend the ceremony at the church. Mabel had furtively cast her eyes around to see if she were present, but Miss Lindsay did not dare trust herself, and therefore prudently remained at home. The invalid had requested to see her sister alone as soon as she returned from the church, and Mabel entered the room in all her wedding finery.

Through some mistake—and the little house was inconveniently crowded—several of the guests strayed into the room after Mabel.

“Dear, precious Mabel,” cried the invalid, clasping her sister’s hand, and kissing it fervently, “I have been praying for you all the time you were at church. I have been present with you in the spirit. Oh, darling! you are now the wife of a rich man. Riches bring their own temptation. Let us try to remember that these things are but vanity of spirit—that the soul is more precious than the vile body, and the spirit than much gold.” She spoke very fluently, but in the presence of so many guests gathered round her couch, she modestly refused to continue her exhortation. Mabel listened to it all with the fixed stony expression, and people greatly marvelled at her hardness of heart.

There was a very handsome breakfast, plenty of champagne, for Jacob had resolved that the thing should be well done—of course the Smiths could not have afforded such an entertainment. The health of the bride

and bridegroom was duly drunk. The clergyman who had performed the marriage ceremony suddenly exclaimed, "Let us pray," and accordingly the company proceeded to prayer, falling on their knees round the table, and praying over a *débris* of broken French rolls and a littering of jelly and blancmange and half-emptied champagne glasses. The prayer offered was full of unction, and very comforting to the great majority present, but the heart of Mabel was like a glowing coal—a sense of unutterable shame weighed upon her. The clergyman prayed that long life might be granted to the married pair, and Mabel prayed for speedy death.

At last it was time for Mabel to prepare for the journey. She retired to her little room, followed by the servant-girl. The excitement of the day had been too much for the nerves of the poor invalid, and Mrs. Smith was forced to remain with her afflicted daughter. Mabel flung off her wedding dress ; she suddenly told the maid that she

must see her mother ; she could endure the torture of silence no longer ; speak she must, she had terrible words to utter—she had not dared to confess her feelings to her sister—she felt that she was as much degraded as the vilest of her sex ; that gloss it as she might, she had sold her youth and beauty for gold. Mrs. Smith hurried into the room in a state of great excitement. “She was so sorry she couldn’t stay a moment, poor Mary was evidently giving way.”

“Listen to me, mother,” cried Mabel in her agony. “I, too, am your daughter.”

Mrs. Smith was terrified by the expression of Mabel’s face, and she was constrained to remain. Suddenly there was a cry downstairs for Mrs. Smith, and the maid burst into the room almost breathless. “Please, ma’am, Miss Mary——” and Mrs. Smith flew downstairs at the first note of alarm.

“Please, Miss Mabel,” said the maid, “Mr. Vaughan says it’s time to start.”

“I shall be ready directly,” answered

Mabel; "go!" and she huddled on the fine travelling costume.

"Mabel, dearest," cried Mr. Vaughan from the foot of the stairs, "are you nearly ready?"

She shuddered at his voice—she scarcely knew what she was doing; she suddenly seized a pair of long scissors which lay in a sheath on the dressing-table, and hid them in her bosom. Her brain whirled with pain, she staggered downstairs; Jacob met her and supported her on his arm. There were many kisses given and warm farewells, but she still retained the hard stony glance. Her father led her to the carriage. "Margaret Lindsay," she murmured, "I want you." There was a sudden bustle and a stir—sundry little boys who were crowding in curiosity round the carriage were brushed aside—and Miss Lindsay's gaunt figure bent into the carriage, she caught Mabel in her arms and kissed her, but not one word did she vouchsafe, and she vanished with the suddenness of her appearance.

Mabel burst into tears. By accident, in stooping forward, the scissors fell down. Amid a shower of rice and satin shoes the carriage drove away.

"Why, Mabel darling," cried Jacob, picking up the scissors, "they must have fallen from the travelling-bag." He gave them to her. She took them from his hand with a shudder, and placed them in the bag. She shrank away from him, she could not dissemble her terror and abhorrence when he approached her; but it was the hour of his triumph—the triumph of his gold over youth and beauty. He laughed at her reluctance and her terror, for he knew he held the girl in his power. Again she prayed for death, but she let him the while press her hand at his will, and clasp her waist as they drove to the station.

After the departure of the married pair, as soon as Mary had sufficiently recovered from her fainting-fit, they had the exceeding comfort of another prayer. It was really almost too sweetly affecting for many

of the persons present, so very beautiful and apt was the reference which the clergyman made to the wise virgins with oil in their lamps. The discourse clearly pointed to the invalid, who had been undoubtedly the heroine of the marriage festival.

"Dearest girl," asked the metaphorical ladies with the tenderest concern, "oh, tell us! Have you a lamp? do you possess any oil?"

"Both lamp and oil, so I humbly trust," she answered in a low but steadfast voice, and her head sank back in exhaustion on the couch. It was very lovely to look at her pale face lighted by the bright smile of faith.

Indeed, all agreed that it was a most edifying occasion—that nothing could be more marked than the blessed spirituality of the one sister, and the hard worldliness of the other. Even the waiter, at 7s. 6d. for the breakfast and afternoon (he was due in the evening at a dinner, and afterwards at a ball supper, and was therefore

a man engrossed by worldly affairs), was deeply affected as he stood in the passage seeking for Mammon at the hands of retiring guests. "Not that I hold with your fruity champagnes at a low figure," said he, "and the company was more for tracts than shillings, but I'm blessed if the praying wasn't that beautiful that the very air seemed full of cherubs like, as I leaned agen the 'ballisters' with the parlour door ajar, because the room was that stuffy."

As the guests were departing, the clergyman, full of spiritual buoyancy, announced his intention of calling on Miss Lindsay (his first pastoral visit) during the afternoon. "You'll find her a very peculiar person," they all said.

The clergyman did call, and he did find Miss Lindsay a very peculiar person. Of course, he talked about the wedding—his language was very round and smooth—and Miss Lindsay grew very irritable and jerky; he also alluded to the blessed manifestation of spiritual life which he had just witnessed.

Miss Lindsay grew still more irritable, used her favourite word "fiddlesticks" very often, and finally called him a fool to his face, whereat he retired, greatly discomfited, probably for the first time in his life; but he was by no means the first person, clerical or lay, that Miss Lindsay had discomfited by excessively plain speaking.

Miss Lindsay retired to her room that evening in a very angry mood; she usually laid the Bible open before her on the dressing-table while she brushed her long back hair. Her enemies always had a very hot time of it during this process; what she felt she felt, and what she felt she said; entanglement by comb was a very special source of invective, and her arch-enemy was particularly liable to fare badly at this period of her toilet; this evening she was especially irate against him.

"Why can't you show yourself, you despicable coward, instead of twisting and wriggling about in the dark? Why, be-

cause you don't dare! You haven't dared to show your ugly face since brave old Martin—glorious old Martin—flung his ink-stand at your head. I'm only a woman, though; he was a big man, he could thunder out a psalm at you. I can't, with my croaky voice. Why don't you try to frighten me? Ah! but Margaret wears the good armour, tried and true, and she comes of a fighting family, does Margaret—you know that well enough, you cur; you know my blessed father and my uncle Harry sleep at Chillianwallah. Cold steel, hey? When old Gough gave the word, and they fell leading their men; and my brother Bob—my bright-eyed noble Bob, my darling Bob!—he died by the side of God's saint and soldier, Havelock—that's why you daren't face Margaret. And that girl—Heaven help her, I can't! I daren't even think about her, and I'm not going to tell lies to God—that girl, I say, you wouldn't have dared to assail her face to face, so you are going to attack her, mean scoundrel as you

are, through the very lines of her goodness, and her generosity, and her self-devotion, and her constancy. Ah! you can't hide your mean dodges from me. You've puffed up the poor souls of those around her with spiritual pride—you know I'm no match for you at that game—sheep, as well as shepherd; that miserable blatant bag of windy words that came maundering here to-day—he won't come a second time, I'll warrant! Yes, you've dragged that girl to degradation through the spirit of self-sacrifice, and you are going to tempt her to destruction through her love and her constancy; you are going to warp in her the sense of right and wrong; you mean to bring that lover home at some accursed moment and fling him in her way. That's your vile wretched game, you crawling beast. Margaret's no fool, she can see in the dark, recollect—but Margaret's to the fore—Glasgow, and the 'Brazen Vessel!' and we mean one and all to fight for Mabel's soul!"

CHAPTER II.

MABEL'S HONEYMOON.

MABEL learnt the greatness of her crime in that drive from her father's house to the railway-station—the horror of her position utterly overcame her. She felt she had sold herself for the man's gold, but she had not been able to cast off her sense of shame—degraded, yet lacking shamelessness to lull the dishonour. Self-sacrifice, whither had it led her? Better have been selfish and clung to honour than endure this fearful abasement for the sake of others; and so there fell upon her that saddest of all trials which beset the human heart—the dark hour when good turns into evil, and the clear waters run with blood.

"If it must be so, make me vile," she cried, in the agony of her soul; "efface my womanhood by degradation. I have committed a great sin, make me also a great sinner—I shall go mad else;" and through her fevered brain flashed thoughts of suicide in divers manners, and she eagerly canvassed each desperate suggestion as it flew before her. And all this time he held her hand clasped fondly in his, and revelled in his victory.

They arrived at the station; a *coupé* had been "engaged" for the newly-married pair. He led her triumphantly along the platform; she with downcast eyes and hard-set face. On the theory of probable largess, there was a certain ceremony of fussy attendance on the part of guards and porters which sufficiently stamped the old man and young woman as bride and bridegroom. On a railway platform, the many pilgrims of life's journey halt awhile and stand together—strange jumble of divergent feelings within the compass of a limited area! Saints and

sinners, cynics and worldlings, brave young hearts full of noble enthusiasm, and old hearts true to the core—to one and all, bride and bridegroom possessed some interest more or less. The saints condemned, the sinners rejoiced vindictively, the cynics smiled, the worldlings, in the thought of Mammon, realized the situation, but the brave young hearts sorrowed; the young women, who had defied poverty for true love's sake, pitied the miserable bride. In the holiness of their love, they could fathom the horror of a loveless union—aye, and there were other women who rejoiced as they gazed, with hard, scornful gaze, at the bride; she, too, had sold herself, for all the consecration of her shame by holy rite and ring.

It seemed to Mabel, in the strange excitement of her brain, as if she could see into the minds of the bystanders and read their damning thoughts. She was conducted to the *coupé*; she started back in horror. If she entered that compart-

ment, she would be alone with this man for the whole journey; she could not endure that revolting thought.

"I hate a *coupé*. Another carriage!" she exclaimed; "I can't bear the draught."

It was useless for Jacob to protest with so many curious bystanders gathered round. She entered, by hazard, another carriage,—any carriage, so that there were other passengers in it.

As the train started, there were signs of significant derision in the crowd; but the young women, who pitied her, uttered a silent prayer on her behalf. Jacob was angry and provoked, and after arranging the wraps and bags, sat sulkily at her side, without speaking. There were two other passengers in the carriage, a young man and a young woman, evidently husband and wife. Mabel's chief anxiety at first was to discover whether these people were going the whole journey. To this end, her ears strove to catch their talk; but little by little she grew absorbed in their happi-

ness ; she could see the holy cord of love and sympathy which bound them together, and she felt, with dismay, that the cord of her love stretched far away across land and ocean to the first and only love of her life—that he and she were truly man and wife—that the marriage ceremony of the morning had put asunder those whom God had joined together. At last, by some accident, a remark was made which presently grew into a conversation. The young woman, who was very sweet and charming, seemed anxious to descend from her own region of happiness and strive with sympathy to cheer Mabel's heart. She said but little, but Mabel felt she meant much, and she blessed her for her kindness. Unfortunately, these pleasant passengers were only going half-way on the destined journey to the Lakes. To Mabel's dismay, they descended from the carriage at a wayside station, and the young wife bid Mabel a tender adieu. The last time Mabel saw them, they were standing together on the

platform, she leaning on his arm, and tears were in her eyes as she waved a farewell to the departing train.

She was alone now with this man in the carriage—her husband! But there was nothing in her heart to assure her that he was her husband. Truly, there had been a wedding ceremony that morning, but it had become dwarfed to an insignificant recollection. It was incredible that *words* could make that man her husband. Ay, and her signature! It was incredible that pen and ink could make her his wife. There seemed, in her unbalanced mind, to be no relation between a form of words and marriage. Impossible! The man she was with could not be her husband.

Jacob had by this time forgotten his sulky fit, and forgiven the affair of the *coupé*; he was gracious once more.

"Come, Mabel," he exclaimed, "give me a kiss, and make it up." He approached her; she shrank away from him into the corner of the carriage, with a shudder.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, with rising anger. "Give me a kiss directly."

She made no answer. He threw himself back into his seat. He had resolved to make her his slave—resolved to domineer over her as his sister had done, and he was determined to commence his course of training forthwith.

"You married me," he said, "not for love—I know that well enough—but you had a purpose."

"I had," she answered, facing him with desperation; the moment had come for speaking the truth without stint. "I married you because I loved *them*—because they were poor, and I could scarcely find them bread. I knew that women have married for money, or rank, and not for love. I knew that women have endured the degradation of marriage without love—then why not I, if I could procure comforts for them? I thought that I could endure this shame; but I can't. I thought that I could be your slave—I could be that; but your wife, never."

"Why not have thought of all this before?" he asked in astonishment at the terrible frankness of her avowal.

"Because I had believed I was more despicable than I am. I meant when I married—I honestly meant—to accept the position, even if I died in the effort; but I can't——"

"And if I say that they shan't enjoy one penny of my money, what then?" he exclaimed vindictively.

"Heaven must help them," she answered. "I can't help them at the price of my shame."

"Shame!" he exclaimed, losing all control; "shame! why, you are my wife."

"No, never, as long as I live!"

"Married this very day!"

"Words, words," she answered bitterly; "man's doing, not God's. I have done an accursed thing; I know that. God help me."

"Ah, my fine lady! but you are my wife," he exclaimed triumphantly. "You

must be tamed; taught obedience. Kiss you I will—it is my right; you are mine, irrevocably mine,” and with angry resolution he once more approached her. Again she drew back from him, crouching in the corner of the carriage—all thought of the marriage ceremony was blotted out of her mind—all recollection that he did possess a husband’s right was effaced; it seemed as if some stranger were offering her a shameful insult. She covered her face with her hands tight clasped. “Look you!” he cried in bated breath, and well-nigh foaming at the mouth with rage, “my house, bed, and board, or a beggar outside my door.”

“A beggar,” she answered back defiantly.

“Ay, and they shall be beggars too,” he continued. “They shall live on in their narrow poverty; they shall cast their reproaches on that woman, daughter and sister; that wife, who has forgotten a wife’s duties, and called a wife’s honour shame. Mind, I can love or I can hate.”

"Hate, hate," she retorted bitterly; not love, that accursed thought.

"What, marry an old man for his money-bags, hey? Ah! but he was too sharp, my dainty lady. Your future depends on your good behaviour—*their* future, too, on your good behaviour. Ah! ah! the villa at Torquay. I shall let it! That allowance of money, which would have made all things smooth and easy. I shall keep it at my bankers. Think well of all these things."

She was silent beneath his threats. Presently she burst into tears. Alas! it was but too true; he had full power to give effect to his threats—full power to render her sacrifice vain. He thought her tears meant submission—at least they proved the power of his word. He loved her in his strange, morbid love, and her tears had a special allurement in his eyes. He felt very proud of her too—proud of her fine spirit; he exulted in the thought that the strong web of his own weaving was woven round the haughty girl; and there was sweet

triumph, too, in the thought that he had wrested her from another man—his possession by the strong bond of law, human and divine. The past fracas was only part and parcel of the taming process. He changed his position, and took the seat next to her.

“You foolish girl!” he cried. “You frightened child! I’m full of kindness. I want to make you happy, give you all you want or wish. I want to do all I can for them, only I must have a little love.” He maundered on awhile, she listening to him with palpitating heart. Thus emboldened, he clasped her hand in his—her husband truly by marriage rite; but he seemed to her, in the agony of her feelings, which warped facts as well as judgment, to be some vile wretch who was trying to lure her with base offers from her husband—that man far away in eastern land, her rightful husband in the sight of God.

Again he attempted to kiss her, to draw his arm round her waist. Sacrilege! With that thought of her lover strong in her

mind, she started up, and strove to thrust away his arm. They struggled together. He was furious, mad with rage. But her strength outmatched his; and, half through her strength, half through a sudden jerk of the train, he fell down on the floor of the carriage.

She was breathless, but uninjured in her young strength, though her heart beat with almost audible beats. "He will rise with renewed fury," she thought; and for the moment she proposed with mad desperation to fling herself out of the carriage. Her hand was on the window; she turned in terror.

But, good God! he did not attempt to move. What was it? What did it mean? She had been prepared for curses, but he did not speak. He only groaned, and breathed with painful, gasping breath. A great horror filled her soul—she sank down on her knees. "Oh, my God! what have I done?" she cried in her exceeding terror. "Spare him or kill me; if he dies, don't let

me live—my husband in sickness and in health—my husband by plighted troth. I've sworn it; those words were in my mouth this very day. Oh, my God! is it possible I can have killed him? Is this the curse of Cain?" she groaned in agony. "Has that awful crime fallen on my head? red hands, and yet a bride!" Fearful visions flew before her eyes; the nightmare vision of an embodied horror clung round her with relentless persistence; she struggled up, almost mechanically, to reach her travelling-bag in the netting to procure brandy and smelling-salts, but she staggered forward; stumbled, and fell down insensible at her husband's feet.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENEMY ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGE.

It really was a very charming villa at Torquay which Jacob Vaughan had selected for his wife's family: good, plain, substantial, comfortable furniture, without one atom of vain show or pomp—just the description of furniture fit for people whose thoughts were set on the Heavenly Sion. The chintz, too, which Mabel had chosen was excessively pretty—simple, at the same time cheerful, but unpretending.

The drawing-room, a bright, pleasant apartment, opened with bow-windows into a small garden which commanded a lovely sea view, Berry Head, in the distance.

There was a steep descent to the shore, covered with pine growth, through which the sea was visible in the breaks of the foliage. Mary Smith, when she was well enough to be carried into the garden, loved to gaze down upon the restless ocean; and the ocean, the ships, the little boats, and the fish of various sorts, afforded her the material for many very lovely and touching metaphors. Nor were the earthly creatures of nourishing and even dainty food denied to this marine paradise; these earthly blessings were duly delivered every mid-day through the appointed channels for their conveyance, namely, tradesmen's carts, which called regularly for orders in the morning; Jacob Vaughan paying the bills quarterly.

So they blessed the day when Mabel became the wife of Mr. Vaughan, and they beheld the hand of Providence working mysteriously through the medium of this marriage for their worldly comfort and great temporal solace. They were indeed deeply

grateful for the blessings conferred upon them, and if they thought less about Mabel than mere worldlings might consider natural, they thought all the more about the Great Source whence all these carnal blessings had flowed; and they most certainly did not fall into the common error of confounding the worldly instrument of their happiness with the First Great Cause of all temporal and eternal good. They were indeed almost nervously anxious to be theologically correct on this all-important point. "We must strive to remember," said Mary, emphatically—and her parents regarded her as an oracle—"that our gratitude is not due to a mere secondary cause; Heaven forbid! Much as we owe to Mabel's kindness, speaking carnally, we owe nothing to her in comparison with the gratitude we owe to Heaven."

The pastor who ministered spiritually to the Smith family at Torquay, a man of thoroughly sound doctrinal views, was deeply impressed with the correctness of

Mary's theology, and even astounded at the clearness of her expositions of sacred truth. "Truly, my dear young lady," he answered, "it is far better to err in forgetting the earthly instrument, than to fall into the grievous sin of forgetting the heavenly origin;" and so in the fear of sin, Mabel's devotion was well-nigh overlooked.

"And your sister, Mrs. Vaughan," inquired the worthy pastor, with sympathetic interest, "I trust that she too has received a full measure, yea, heaped up, of gospel grace?"

"Dear, good, kind Mabel!" answered Mary, with tears in her eyes—and she would not trust herself to make a direct reply—"we must hope, and pray earnestly, and humbly trust—poor dear, about a year ago she became the wife of a very rich man, and we all know how carnal riches tend to choke up our sinful hearts; but the Lord has dealt very mercifully with her. Viewed with merely worldly eyes, her marriage from the very commencement was very sad.

Her worthy husband was afflicted with a paralytic seizure on their wedding journey, and from that moment she became his nurse; nothing, I am sure, can exceed her devoted attention. Of course, at the very first, we were dreadfully shocked, and could only behold the sadness of the event; but every day shows us more and more its sanctifying blessedness, and I am glad to say we are now able to regard it in the light of a wondrous blessing. Dear Mabel has been mercifully saved from a career of worldliness; Mr. Vaughan, whose heart, I fear, was full of the old Adam, has been awakened to a sense of sin; and the great and terrible uncertainty of all human plans and hopes has been brought directly home to us all, for our great profit and advantage, through this blessed visitation."

The Rev. Mr. Simeon (such was the name of the worthy pastor) was visibly affected to tears by the truly scriptural tone of Mary's words. They asked him to stay to dinner, and he stayed—a plain dinner,

they said apologetically; and he answered graciously, making scriptural reference to ox and herb. And a pleasant savour of roastings was wafted kitchenwise as the neat maid entered, tray in hand, to lay the cloth—and that savour was an effective condemnation of the apology. It was in truth a dinner of great inward comfort, although entirely divested of mere worldly display; a nice large Torbay sole, delicately boiled, with plain melted butter (Burgess's anchovy could be added at pleasure), made to perfection, as melted butter is seldom made. This was followed by a loin of early lamb with the kidney, roasted to a turn, and early asparagus; and Mr. Simeon liked both these creatures. Nice new potatoes, too, mealy young things, served smoking hot in the whitest of all damask; and a custard pudding, almost as well made as the pudding Mabel made with a breaking heart. Finally, a lovely cream cheese, rich with all the richness of Devonshire pastures. A full, yet duly matured, port; and Mr. Simeon

enjoyed a generous wine. When the eyes were raised above these creature comforts, there was Berry Head in the distance, and the full sweep of the bay lighted by the setting sun, with the Brixham fishing fleet in the offing. And Mary, with the rays of light flushing her pale face, talked very, very sweetly, and yet withal in a modest, unpretending, simple manner, about the sun, and the boats, and the fish, and she showed that these things were mercifully intended to be examples to us all, as much to the simplest as to the wisest. And she was never tired of talking in this sweet strain, nor were her parents of listening; and if Mr. Simeon closed his eyes for a minute or so, it was because the sun dazzled them, and it was moreover his wont to take a short nap after dinner; though, in truth, Mrs. Smith marvelled at his somnolence.

It was manifestly needful to say something gracious in recognition of such a thoroughly adequate dinner, and Mr. Simeon said it in the blindest manner,

making use of two distinct figures of speech as he lingered in the hall bidding adieu to Mrs. Smith. "Verily, my dear lady, a feast of fat things, as well as a feast of edification. Your blessed daughter is a monition to the best of us. So young (figure the first, marine), and yet already laid up in ordinary, having weathered the storms of life; so lovely in spirit (figure the second, commerce), like a precious jewel cased in cotton wool." Mrs. Smith loved to hear such speeches; and if she did not quite understand the relevancy of the images, perhaps the charm of a metaphor is augmented by its irrelevance.

"May we all possess that precious wool," continued Mr. Simeon solemnly, "finest jeweller's wool carded by the teeth of tribulation;" and so saying he departed. All this was very comforting to Mrs. Smith; it was her dearest ambition—only ambition is a sinful word; her dearest hope, then—to be the mother of a saint. "Stiff Collars," indeed—the words still rankled in her soul

—"Stiff Collars ; or, Don't be Stuck up," stood hatefully in the chambers of her memory, like Mordecai sitting at the king's gate ; but notwithstanding Miss Lindsay's cruel scoff, the saintship of Mary seemed assured. Mrs. Smith returned to the parlour. Mr. Smith was engaged in the comfortable doze of mental peace and digestive equilibrium, but Mary's eyes were filled with tears.

"My darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, with tender solicitude.

"Oh, mother," answered Mary with fervour, "we must pray very earnestly for dear Mabel's conversion, so that she may be vouchsafed the blessing of everlasting peace."

Most assuredly Mary Smith was not a hypocrite. The formula of faith which she possessed was quite sufficient for her nature, because morally and physically she needed little ; but Mabel wanted far more, with her larger soul and healthy body. Easy enough to fashion saints out of thin materials, small

brains, and weak bodies, ascetics of the cloister or the front parlour; more difficult out of large brains and larger bodies, flung into the vortex of the world, and subject to the domination of earthly laws.

There would have been easy saintship for Mabel if she could have been dwarfed to the dimensions of her sister; but she was gifted with grand qualities of soul, and she was destined to be tried and tempted, not through the meanness of her nature, but through its excellence—the good was to be turned into evil, and the evil was to become good. Accepting for the nonce Miss Lindsay's faith in an embodiment of evil, it would be manifest to the devil's brain that such a woman would be proof against all low, mean temptation; it would be necessary to tempt her through her virtues. Constancy is a great virtue; then turn constancy into a sin. Self-sacrifice is the greatest virtue; then make self-sacrifice a crime, and leave the dire perplexities of soul to be dealt with by a highly-trained

and sensitive conscience, and a large, loving heart.

Jacob Vaughan had been sorely stricken in body; he was, in truth, almost as helpless an invalid as Mary Smith, requiring to be carried or wheeled about from place to place. A dark cloud of remorse rested on Mabel's brow; she felt, rightly or wrongly, that the terrible affliction which had befallen him was her work; she had been guilty of a great crime, though Heaven had mercifully averted the crime of murder from her head, and had left her the power of expiation.

At the commencement of his attack he displayed the greatest aversion towards her, cursed her bitterly when she entered his presence. It was a terrible ordeal; her own heart was burning with the desire of reparation. "I am ready to be his slave," she cried in her prayer to heaven; "in mercy give me some favour in his sight; let him only tolerate me as a hired nurse." It was a long struggle, but her devotion and

tenderness won their way at last. In his selfishness, Jacob Vaughan discovered that he did really possess a slave in the woman he had married, that she was ready to bear all his infirmities of temper with loving submission, while hirelings turned away even from his gold. Heaven only knew how much she endured, for she never whispered a word to a living soul, but she bore it without repining; nay, the very burden was a solace to her sad conscience.

Not only had she to suffer much from her husband's irritable temper, but she had also to endure the hatred and jealousy of his family. Of course they never could forgive her marriage. They used to gather round the couch of the invalid with profuse expressions of condolence and sympathy, and they sought convenient occasion to cast insidious doubts on the sincerity of her devotion. It was easy enough, said Mrs. Corley openly to her brother, to see the motive for a young wife's attention to an old and wealthy husband. Mabel was aware that cruel things

were said of her; the jealousy of Mr. and Mrs. Corley was plain to all eyes. She endeavoured to live down the injustice—to vanquish the calumny by, if possible, increased zeal and tenderness. But at last, in an evil moment, she was provoked beyond endurance. Jacob, in a fit of petulance, taxed her in the presence of Mrs. Corley with mercenary motives. She was trying to get the old man's money into her grasp. If Mrs. Corley had not been present, she would have fallen on her knees and striven with earnest protest to combat the hard words; but her woman's temper was provoked beyond endurance. She turned on Mrs. Corley with all her latent power, the strength of which Jacob knew too well, and with a few sharp words she administered a scathing rebuke to Mrs. Corley.

“You have placed a lie between me and my husband; you have poisoned the very air between us. I have endured very much, and endured it gladly—a burden which I

have borne in tenderness and love—and he knows it. Henceforth you shall take that burden on yourself; you shall be his nurse; you may take that accursed gold, which, God knows, I have never sought, and for which I have never served.”

“Mighty fine talking!” said Mrs. Corley, growing alarmed.

“More than talking,” answered Mabel, “acting! Henceforth you are my husband’s nurse; I am a stranger in this house. He may leave me a beggar—I’ll never ask for one penny of his wealth.” Overmastered by the strength of her indignation, she turned to leave the room.

“Mercy me! hoity-toity!” cried Mrs. Corley, scarcely knowing what course to take, and in great dismay at the course things were taking.

“Silence, Maria!” exclaimed Jacob, with emphasis. He also was becoming alarmed; he knew what comfort Mabel really was to him.

“Mabel,” he murmured in a low tone.

She stopped with her hand on the door. In a moment, the terror of that scene in the railway carriage flashed into her mind, awakening horror and remorse. She turned back in terror, and threw herself on her knees at her husband's side. "God forgive me! I will never leave you—never, call me what you will—mercenary, heartless, base. I am your wife, I will never leave your side—never, never!"

From that moment she won the old man's heart. There was something in the power of her voice which stirred him, and perhaps something more in the thought of the scant gratitude with which he had repaid her devotion; in any event, Mrs. Corley's wicked and clumsy efforts to regain lost ground in her brother's affections were defeated.

It was not a noble love that Jacob gave to Mabel. The seeds, whether of wheat or of tares, that were sown in such a nature could only result in a stunted growth: mean and petty in good, as well as mean and

petty in evil. Such were the limitations of Jacob Vaughan's nature.

The idea of *quid pro quo* had ruled Jacob Vaughan's life. He could understand service for wages, but not service for love; and being now determined that Mabel should love him, he sought to buy her love. "Only let her be good to him now, and she should possess the old man's money another day, every penny." The words brought a blush of shame to her face, they branded her with meanness; she protested vehemently against the injustice of such a disposition of his property. "Every penny," he answered doggedly; and he summoned his solicitor, Mr. Barton, to his sofa-side. This gentleman had long been Jacob's legal adviser, and he was really a gentleman in all true senses of the word. Jacob directed him to draft a will bequeathing all his property to his wife, Mabel Vaughan. Mr. Barton, on his part, entered a solemn protest against this instruction, holding that he had a moral as well as a professional duty to

perform, and he pointed out in forcible language the injustice of such a disposition ; but it was all in vain.

Mr. Barton, somewhat sternly, addressed a protest to Mabel, as if believing her to be the evil counsellor (Mabel had been compelled by her husband, sorely against her will, to remain in the room during the interview). It was exquisitely painful that a stranger should believe her capable of a mercenary intrigue. As far as she dared to speak, she supported the objections of Mr. Barton ; but Jacob silenced her in his dogged, obstinate manner. The original directions were peremptorily enforced, and Mr. Barton with some ill grace left the room, followed by Mabel. She did not dare to be absent very long, so great was the jealousy and suspicion of Jacob at her absence. "For God's sake," she whispered to Mr. Barton, "don't believe that this is my doing. I am not a miserable adventuress seeking my own profit. I solemnly swear to you, let the will be drawn as it may, I will not, if I out-

live my husband, take one shilling more than you consider my due." Up to this time Mr. Barton had entertained the worst possible opinion of Mabel's character ; but the earnestness of her voice struck him. "Heaven knows," she continued sorrowfully, "I have a hard task to perform, but it is too sad that good and honourable people should consider me mean and base."

From that moment Mr. Barton began to believe in her, and with dawning belief came pity ; his countenance lost its sternness. He was not a man of many words. "I believe what you say," he answered, and he grasped her hand with a heartfelt grasp. "Good-bye ;" and Mabel returned to her husband's room comforted. "And yet," argued Mr. Barton, when he had left the house, "she must have married Jacob for the sake of his money ;" but he did not know till after-days that she had married for the sake of others, and not for herself.

Day by day, Jacob's love grew less endurable. In his invalid state, he was, of

course, unable to receive or entertain company, but it was his fancy that Mabel should wear fine dresses, and deck herself with jewelry. He ordered silk and satin dresses with costly trimmings of lace. It was in vain for her to protest; he would have the things worn. Jacob was possessed of several valuable diamond ornaments, which in the course of business he had accepted in lieu of money payments; he insisted upon giving her these valuable trinkets from time to time. "I don't desire them," she would answer with a sigh, but he insisted on fastening the glittering earring in her ear, and clasping the necklet round her throat.

"There's five hundred pounds' worth," he said boastfully.

"For Heaven's sake don't give me these expensive jewels," she protested; "it makes them say such wicked things about me."

"They are yours—yours," he answered with a chuckle. "You look so handsome in them—a queen—my queen! It is my

pleasure to see you splendidly dressed." And other costly gifts did he heap upon her—India shawls, fine lace, and rich furs. Some women would have gladly accepted the situation ; if they could not have loved the man, there was at least avarice for consolation.

Curses, slavery, body and soul worn out in devotion to duty, Mabel could have endured all that without flinching, and she had endured it ; but Jacob's love was a terrible burden, because it awoke the recollections of old love in her bosom, and then the contempt she felt for herself was insupportable. Amid all her perplexities of soul, Miss Lindsay was the one consolation of her life ; she could pour forth, if not all, at least a great portion of her sorrows to that lady, Her first interview had taught her that, beneath great surface eccentricity, and even *brusquerie*, lay a brave, true, and merciful heart ; and Miss Lindsay's first impression of Mabel had been confirmed—only, by the way, Miss Lindsay's faith never required

confirmation—by all that had subsequently passed between them.

In addition to personal predilection, Mabel possessed the deepest interest for Miss Lindsay, an interest which had increased from the moment she had been compelled to close her wallet utterly non-plussed. Hitherto it had been Miss Lindsay's mission to exchange straightforward sledge-hammer blows with her invisible antagonist—sin was sin, therefore knock it down, and she had knocked it down with great success; but she now felt that the sledge-hammer was useless, that her wily opponent had changed his weapons—that recourse must be had to skilled fencing with highly-tempered foils. Miss Lindsay, as a matter of taste, preferred the sledge-hammer, with its broad, swinging freedom; nevertheless she grasped the new weapon with thorough zest, though with a sense of diffidence as to her skill in its use.

“Why was I told that human nature was inconstant, fickle, shallow, desperately

false?" asked Mabel mournfully one day when they were together; "why was this faith drilled into me till I believed it?"

"Because it is the truth," answered Miss Lindsay decisively.

"It isn't," retorted Mabel; "I only wish it were."

"It is the truth," persisted Miss Lindsay. "Unregenerated human nature is desperately false, and fickle, and shallow."

"Do you think my nature is regenerate?" asked Mabel.

"Certainly not!" answered Miss Lindsay authoritatively.

"Then that faith isn't true," replied Mabel with emphasis, "or I shouldn't be tortured like this—I should have forgotten that lover long ago."

"Hush, Mabel!" exclaimed Miss Lindsay, glancing around nervously; "he will hear you."

"Who?" asked Mabel, with some surprise, for they were alone.

"He's always listening," was the answer

in an undertone, and Mabel understood to whom Miss Lindsay referred.

"Let him listen," she exclaimed with desperation; "I don't care. I knew that women had been false in love ere this—had married for money—had lived through it all—had had children; then why not I? I'm not regenerate; why can't I be fickle, and shallow, and inconstant?"

"Hush!" cried Miss Lindsay, terrified at Mabel's words; "this is the devil's work!"

"No!" exclaimed Mabel vehemently.

"He puts the thought of that man into your soul."

"No!" reiterated Mabel, in sharp protest, "not the devil; God's doing. God made me true and constant. They made me believe I was low, and mean, and contemptible. I thought I could be false, and yet not feel ashamed, at least just after a bit—just after the first dash of shame. Not the devil," she murmured, "God, God;" and she clasped her hands over her face.

"You must pray," said Miss Lindsay; "that's the remedy—pray earnestly."

"Pray," echoed Mabel desperately; "pray, what for?—pray to be inconstant—pray to forget the noblest thoughts of my life, for all my best thoughts were woven round his life. When I try to pray, it drives me mad. Every word I utter is a lie. God had made me true and constant, I say; God had given me a great and holy love—God help me. They said it was the devil's doing; and now, because I believed in that accursed blunder, I must pray to God to undo all His good work—to make me false and contemptible! I'll suffer any torture before I pray for that."

Miss Lindsay was silent for the second time in her life.

Mabel, in quick revulsion of feeling, grew half terrified at the length to which the vehemence of her feelings had carried her. When she looked up, she saw the tears in Miss Lindsay's eyes. Touched to the heart, she rose from her chair, and, throwing her

arms round Miss Lindsay's neck, she kissed her fervently. "You darling soul," she cried earnestly, "I know I pain you deeply; but say it out I must, or it would kill me. There's no one else I dare speak to. Don't grieve for me, dear; I'm not left without some comfort. I can work for him, you know. I can try to do my duty as a wife. It's only when I sit still and think that I am unhappy. I must go now; he hates my being out of his sight. Poor soul, his life is very sad. I try to do all I can; I do, indeed. You mustn't think I am always unhappy," she added, in the desire to cheer Miss Lindsay's drooping spirits. "I am quite happy when I feel I can be of comfort or service to him—I am, indeed. Come, give me one of your real, true kisses; they always do me good, and make me strong and brave."

Miss Lindsay kissed Mabel, but she did not utter a single word; and Mabel went her way.

As soon as she was alone, Miss Lindsay

shook her head mournfully across the table. She did not make use of any of her vehement expressions of contempt.

“ You are horribly clever, wickedly clever, accursedly clever,” she murmured. “ I never thought you were so clever as this ; ” and, involuntarily and insensibly, Miss Lindsay yielded for the first time in her life that admiration to her old antagonist which we are compelled, *volens volens*, to concede to the skill of our worst enemies—the admiration which a great general feels for a great opponent—an accomplished swordsman for a foe worthy of his steel. “ You have laid your accursed hand on that girl’s soul, and paralyzed her power of prayer ; you are building a great wall between her soul and God. ‘ Glasgow ’ and the ‘ Brazen Vessel, ’ ” she murmured mechanically in her great perplexity, but she no longer used the words as defiant battle-cries. “ We must have specific prayer, if possible—something to grip home ; generalized prayer won’t be half as effective ; and then with good, hearty, Scotch praying—— ”

But she could not quite see her way to frame a specific prayer. "Oh, you scoundrel," she exclaimed, half in a fretful protest, and half as a sort of appeal for generosity, "it's too bad to run me into a corner like this. With all your cleverness, it's cowardly, I say. Only fight me in the open, and I don't care; but don't keep dodging behind the bushes."

She took pen and paper with purpose to address a letter to the editor of the "Brazen Vessel," but her fluent pen halted after the first initial words. After a few moments of painful effort, "What's the meaning of this?" she cried, stricken with sudden terror. "Oh, Lord!" she exclaimed, in words of intense feeling, "don't let him beat me; he thinks he's going to snatch a precious soul from Margaret's hands. I can't tell you what to do; you must tell me; but, oh, don't let him harm that poor girl—she's the best and truest woman I ever met."

For the first time in her spiritual life Miss

Lindsay found herself unable to dictate or even suggest a course of action in her prayers; hitherto she had been enabled to assume the position of a counsellor, or superior monitor, or even an awakener of the divine mercy; but now she felt utterly helpless, and could only pray for help in an indefinite manner.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS LINDSAY WINS THE FIRST SKIRMISH.

MARY SMITH's letters to her sister were very beautiful: they breathed a simple, unaffected spirit of piety, and they almost drove Mabel mad. The Rev. Mr. Simeon, however, read many of these letters with great pleasure and edification before they were despatched on their mission of consolation. Mrs. Smith, with a mother's pardonable pride, was wont to show them to the reverend gentleman, notwithstanding all Mary's earnest entreaties. As time progressed, Mr. Simeon became a very frequent visitor, or rather dropper-in, at the house: sometimes dinner, sometimes tea (Mr.

Simeon was a man who liked his muffin, and appreciated a well-infused cup—none of those second fillings-up, the result of large families); sometimes supper, a light digestible meal, something hot, just tossed off, savoury, but not too substantial; and Mr. Simeon had been peremptorily ordered by his doctor, notwithstanding many protests on his part, never to omit taking just one glass of very old Irish whiskey—one exact wineglass, full to the brim, his medical adviser had been very emphatic on this point—in rather more than half a tumbler of hot water, with two lumps of sugar, or even three, but no lemon; the whiskey, indeed, was a sound, warm friend to the inner man, but the lemon was the root of all evil. “Partaking, probably, of the nature of the forbidden fruit,” observed the reverend gentleman; “at least, so I am inclined to surmise, although, of course, our opinions on that point are necessarily speculative. In truth,” he continued, “I hold that the lemon in its use can only be rendered harm-

less, even to persons of strong digestion, when used as a concomitant in the preparation of the cheesecake. How much we may learn," said he, pursuing the subject in an elevated tone, "from these merely earthly creatures—evil rendered innocuous by being mingled with good things; nay, converted, in sort, into a happiness, or even a blessing, to man."

"I trust I shall never partake of another cheesecake," observed Mary Smith, earnestly, "without reflecting upon the valuable moral you have drawn." Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith warmly indorsed their daughter's resolution.

It was during after-supper periods that Mr. Simeon was usually favoured with the perusal of Mary Smith's letters. The subjects treated varied, of course, according to circumstances, but the method of treatment was invariable, and every subject conducted to edification, even at the cost sometimes of a certain straining of the language.

“DARLING PRECIOUS MABEL,

“We are just now greatly perplexed as to our choice of a carpet for my bedroom; perhaps a Dutch or a really stout Kidderminster would serve the purpose, but then they are not very durable; and sometimes we think that a Brussels, although dearer at first—but we must remember that last year’s patterns come cheaper by nearly ninepence halfpenny a yard. What a lesson this is to us all; yes, *now* is the appointed time, but last year has lost half its profit. Would Mr. Vaughan object to the prime cost of a Brussels? If he would not, why, then we should doubtless be directed to make a choice for the best; at least, I humbly trust we should.

“You are never absent from my thoughts, dearest. I never cease to rejoice in the many blessings bestowed upon you. Mr. Vaughan’s illness has indeed proved a wondrous mercy. Speaking for myself, I can never be sufficiently thankful for my own afflictions. I am by nature desperately

depraved and inherently wicked, and those afflictions have saved me from many worldly temptations; and you also, darling Mabel, have been taught not to trust in the earthly Mammon; yes, dearest, you have been mercifully preserved from a thousand dangers which beset the worldlings in their pilgrimage of sin."

Mr. Simeon frequently wiped away a tear (and Mrs. Smith treasured each tear as a testimony to her daughter's merit) after reading these effusions of pious resignation. Everything seemed so blessed and edifying. The room was very warm and comfortable; no draughts, the doors and windows having been carefully listed up; an easy armchair, a bright fire, the red curtains closely drawn, the grateful steam of the hot whiskey and water; outside, the rough, howling wind, and from the beach below the roar and thud of the beating waves; but inside that little room perfect peace. Mr. Simeon was wont at these seasons to pray very earnestly for

the mariners tossed on the troubled waters, and accepting the sea as an apt figure, he would pray for the souls of men tossed on the troubled waters of life—that their souls might be brought into that land-locked harbour where they themselves were safely moored; and their prayers, be it said, were thoroughly sincere and heartfelt, but they did not know how many were the cross-currents and perplexed winds which barred the *narrow* mouth of this their harbour—hindrances which would effectually prevent divers souls from ever finding rest in the quiet haven they had won.

“Why can’t she help and comfort me?” Mabel would often ask in surprise and despair when she read one of her sister’s letters. “She is so good, and kind, and loving, and she is my own sister; and yet Miss Lindsay’s kiss is the only thing that helps me on. I must be desperately wicked,” she exclaimed, “if Mary’s love and piety can do me no good. A curse must surely rest upon my head—almost a

murderer, though saved by God's mercy, yet morally guilty in God's eyes." But mercifully the dark cloud that gathered round her was dispelled by the devoted service she was called upon to render to the invalid; the call of daily duty saved her from hopeless despair.

For a short period Mabel had the satisfaction of feeling that her devotion and unselfishness had won their way in raising her husband from the mean level of his existence—in teaching him that there were beings devoid of all alloy of sordid motive, loyal in their very essence to the law of duty and right. She could raise him, indeed, to the sense of this higher life, but she could not sustain him at the lofty height. The day came to him at last when he could have won her heart and made her truly his; a great test-day, when perfect faith in her would have been blessedness for him; but Jacob Vaughan was unable to conceive such faith, and so, instead of blessedness, he found a curse.

It was the custom of the household for all the letters of the morning's delivery to be brought directly into Jacob's room, where they were opened and usually read aloud by Mabel. Jacob was always entertained by the morning's budget; business letters, letters from Torquay full of edification, and begging letters, for Jacob's wealth was well known. Mabel was usually the amanuensis in replying to these communications, for Jacob wrote with some difficulty. On one special morning there chanced to be fewer letters than usual: it was Jacob's amusement to con over the directions and make guesses as to the writer before opening the envelope. "I don't know this hand," he exclaimed, after a few moments' consideration, and he threw a letter across to Mabel. "A woman's hand, I fancy; it's addressed to you."

Mabel trembled when she saw the handwriting. Had it been possible, she would have endeavoured to conceal the letter from her husband.

"Whose writing is it?" asked Jacob.

"Mrs. Foster's, I think. I'm not sure."

"Who is Mrs. Foster?" he inquired.

"The mother of Mr. Frank Foster; the gentleman to whom I once told you I had been engaged."

"Ah, well," exclaimed Jacob, in a tone of irritation, "what the deuce does she want, writing to you?"

"She merely says she is ill, and that she would very much like to see me if I could call upon her." Mabel placed the letter in Jacob's hands.

"Where did you tell me this Mr. Foster was?" asked Jacob.

"Somewhere at Tiflis," she answered, "engaged on a railway survey; I haven't heard lately. You won't mind my calling upon Mrs. Foster?—she's a very old friend, though I have not seen her for a long time."

"Certainly not," Jacob answered, huffily; "call, by all means." He then changed the topic, referring to the contents of other

letters; but he seemed, nevertheless, pre-occupied, and more than usually irritated.

"If you don't wish me to see Mrs. Foster, I'm sure I won't," said Mabel, meekly.

"Nonsense; go, by all means," insisted Jacob. "I wish you to go—I can spare you for an hour's visit. Be exact, mind; take the brougham. I shall be interested to hear what she wants with you. Be off at once," added Jacob, peremptorily.

Mrs. Foster lay ill, reclining on a sofa; narrow circumstances, but a sufficiency for small wants. Mabel kissed her when she entered the room, but there was a certain feeling of constraint between the two women—the past had cast a cold shadow on their hearts.

"I have sent to ask you to do me a favour," said Mrs. Foster; "from what the doctors tell me, I believe I shall ask very few more favours of anybody."

"Oh, Mrs. Foster! don't say that," exclaimed Mabel.

"The doctors say so, my dear, and I

must accept His decree without repining ; indeed, I have only one tie that binds me to earth, though that indeed is a great bond—but—— ” she hesitated a moment, and then added, in changed tone, “but to business at once, because I know I have no right to detain you from your home duties.”

“ I assure you that Mr. Vaughan—— ” interposed Mabel.

“ It's not for myself,” continued Mrs. Foster, speaking rapidly and with an air of embarrassment. “ I am going to ask you to do something for Frank.”

“ Anything I can do,” answered Mabel, in a troubled voice.

“ You must never say that I asked you,” continued Mrs. Foster ; “ he would never forgive me if he knew it.”

“ Why, may I not do a friendly act by him, or by any one, if I can ? ” pleaded Mabel.

“ You and he are different from other people,” answered Mrs. Foster significantly.

“ But you must remember,” exclaimed

Mabel, "that our engagement was broken off by mutual consent: we are no more to one another now than ordinary persons."

"True enough in mere words," rejoined Mrs. Foster; "it is only right you should feel so, Mabel; nay, it is your sacred duty."

"But he—Frank—Mr. Foster," stammered Mabel; "surely he has forgotten that foolish love affair. Surely he is not so absurd as to think about a stupid boy-and-girl attachment?"

"Don't let us pursue this painful subject," exclaimed Mrs. Foster, arousing herself from the train of thought into which she had fallen. "My request is simply this: Frank's great friend writes to me to say that the country is trying his health terribly; he has had one sad attack of fever; he is better now, but he ought to leave Tiflis."

"But Frank—what does he write?" inquired Mabel, with painful interest.

"He never writes about his health—he seems quite indifferent about himself now."

Mrs. Foster saw that Mabel started at her words. "You remember, my dear, that he always was very careless about his health," she added, endeavouring to qualify the effect of the previous sentence; but the added words could not hide the fatal admission from Mabel.

"You mean my marriage!" she exclaimed, in a mournful tone. "You mean—oh, my God!—you mean, he cares for me still?"

"I am sure, my dear, I never gave you to understand anything of that sort," rejoined Mrs. Foster, terrified by Mabel's emotion. But Mabel gave no credence to the empty denial.

"I have never forgotten him," she exclaimed, with sad emphasis; "never, never; but I thought he had forgotten me. God help me, I thought that—believed that——" and she sank back in her chair with a low cry of anguish.

She saw it all in her mind's eye—the vision of an instant, but a vision of vivid

reality. His love for her was warping his very existence. Faithful, though she had been false; this poor human nature, which she had been taught to despise as the devil's handicraft—behold, it was very noble and true.

Mrs. Foster had no real idea of the strength of Mabel's agony; in very love for her son, and with resulting animosity against Mabel, she could not resist one home-thrust. "I know your engagement was broken off; but if you had never forgotten him, why did you marry that rich man?"

"Why, why?" echoed Mabel mechanically, and she sought awhile for a reply; a lie had wrought the evil, a lie must avert the sad results. "Why," she exclaimed suddenly, starting from her chair, "because I liked to be rich! I had been so poor all my life—had worked so hard," she continued, in a sort of half-hysterical laugh; "and I thought it would be so nice to have money—fine clothes, a carriage—no longer

a beggarly governess, but a rich woman. Tell him that; tell him that you have seen me, that I enjoy being rich. A poor boy-and-girl marriage, indeed, with a lot of wretched, half-clothed, half-washed children! Nonsense moping after any woman in this absurd way; it is positively too ridiculous, Mrs. Foster. Tell him from me that he must get well and strong as soon as he can, and work hard and make a fortune; money's the thing, after all; there are numbers of women who will like to marry him then. Well, and what's the favour you want me to do?" she asked, abruptly.

"Nothing, Mrs. Vaughan, I thank you," answered Mrs. Foster, in a tone of voice that assured Mabel, who stood writhing with shame and self-contempt beneath her mask of assumed cynicism, that the cursed words had had their effect.

"Oh! but you must tell me," rejoined Mabel, with a forced laugh. "Remember what a long way I have come."

"It is merely that I have been informed

that Mr. Vaughan has great interest, through money transactions with Sleafords, the contractors who employ my son. They carry on works in other parts of the world. A word from Mr. Vaughan would cause Frank to be removed to a more healthy place."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Mabel. "Of course I'll ask—I'd ask a favour of that sort for any friend. I am only very glad that I am in a position which enables me to ask favours for my friends. I positively must say good-bye, Mrs. Foster. I wish I could stay longer, but I mustn't keep the brougham waiting. Mr. Vaughan is so fidgety about his horses; he always buys for me the finest that money can procure. Tell Frank to work hard and make a fortune; some day, when he returns to England—a rich man, mind—I promise to find him a wife among my friends. Farewell!"

In another minute Mabel would have broken down; she did break down utterly when she was alone in her brougham.

"Dear Frank! darling Frank!" she murmured; "true-hearted, noble Frank! he will cease to care for me when he reads his mother's next letter—thank God for that."

Jacob Vaughan lay brooding over the contents of Mrs. Foster's letter. It was a very small matter. But thought presently kindled a spark of discontent. A small soul was Jacob Vaughan's, but large enough to house a large proportion of mean qualities, and it was warped, moreover, by the morbid influences of shattered health. Mrs. Foster's letter was perfectly simple and candid. She had wished to see Mabel as an old friend; but the letter was sufficient to light up the fire of jealousy; no need for a lying scoundrel to stand at Jacob Vaughan's elbow and weave a tissue of lies—he carried Iago in his own bosom, and he created his own promptings to jealousy. Dull of thought and slow of imagination had been Jacob Vaughan, but the inert mass was quickened by the new flame, and the ordinary blank of thought was filled with

strange pictures of the imagination. He painted a future, and saw it in his mind's eye—a future not very far distant, for he felt that his own days were numbered. He beheld his wife married to her first lover. The grave indeed would have closed over him, and death would have absolved her from all duty and fidelity to him, her now husband; but the future possibility seemed as painfully vivid as a present reality, and he wholly forgot that his own death was a necessary factor in the realization of his vision.

Mabel hurried into her husband's room as soon as she arrived home; she was all eagerness to fulfil her promise to Mrs. Foster—the tears, indeed, were scarcely dry in her eyes.

“Well,” he asked impatiently, arousing himself at her presence from his morbid thoughts, “and what did she want?”

“It was about her son—Mr. Foster,” answered Mabel. “He is very ill at Tiflis; the climate don't agree with him. Mrs.

Foster hears that your influence with the Sleafords would get him removed to a more healthy post."

"My influence, indeed!" answered Jacob sullenly.

"Do it for my sake, if you can," she asked with eager expression.

"Why for your sake?" exclaimed Jacob in angry tone.

"Why—why," she answered with hesitation, "why, I was once engaged to be married to him, you know that. It was broken off because we were too poor; but—" she stammered.

"But you love him still?" he rejoined, tauntingly.

"I am your wife!" she answered with dignity, though her face flushed at his words.

"But you love him still?" reiterated Jacob violently. "Out with it, yes or no; no lies, mind—they won't do."

"My answer is, I am your wife. I have never forgotten that, God knows."

"You do love him?" he persisted.

"I will not tell you a lie; I do love him," she answered with firmness, though a tremor ran through her frame as she made the avowal. "Don't let there be any equivocation on the point; I do love him."

He started with surprise at the unexpected boldness and candour of her declaration.

"I cannot help loving him. That's not my fault, though it may be my misfortune. What I can do is to be faithful in my duty to you as a wife. I have been faithful in the sight of God and man! Not one word, not one jot of communication, verbal or written, has ever passed between us since I married you, or, indeed, for a long time before that. I have sworn never to see him again."

"Till I die!" shrieked Jacob.

"Death may come to either or all at any moment," she answered solemnly.

"Till I die," he reiterated; "and then?"

"Have mercy!" she cried, and she fell

on her knees at his side. "You know in your own heart that I have been true to you in word and deed; deal generously with me—use the influence you possess in his behalf, and I shall love you with my whole heart and soul."

"For his sake," he retorted, vindictively.

It was a bitter rejoinder to her declaration of truth and honesty. "Oh, merciful Heaven!" she murmured hopelessly, and turning away from him, she left the room; and thus it was that Jacob Vaughan threw away the golden opportunity that was afforded him of winning his wife's heart.

She had not been absent very long, scarcely time enough to bathe her eyes, when he sent for her.

"My reading, my reading," he exclaimed, reproachfully; "you are forgetting that. Time is very precious with us all, and you have scarcely read anything to-day."

Mary Smith had, as we have seen, announced to Mr. Simeon that Jacob Vaughan had been mercifully awakened to a sense of

sin. That he stood in sore need of conversion no candid person could deny. He possessed many patent faults : he was mean, ungenerous, and selfish ; he was a coward to boot. Well, his conversion was not difficult. They talked to him about the wrath to come, and he became frightened ; they told him his soul was in imminent peril, and his selfishness sealed his repentance. He clung desperately to every watchword of faith, to every religious exercise that was recommended—religious books, they said, let him read them diligently ; and he converted the mediums of religious life into a superstitious worship as abject as any Romish worship of image or picture. The act of reading, or hearing a religious book read for a certain set period during the day, was converted in his eyes into an act which savoured of salvation. There were those who boasted loudly of his conversion, and he indeed echoed all the watchwords of salvation with a fervour as intense as the most pious persons could desire—the

fervour of abject terror; and the old selfishness of his nature was irradiated by the *fear* of God. So, with his eyes blinded by that fear, he never knew that close at his side, tending him devotedly day by day, was one who, in the strong sense of duty, was striving to vanquish self—that in following her example, and forgetting self for the sake of others, he might have found happiness instead of gloom, turning religion into a joy instead of a fear; but his spiritual advisers had only succeeded in hardening his self-love.

Mabel took up the book at her husband's bidding, and read its words of fervent piety in her accustomed tones. It was a very irksome task. Notwithstanding all her early training, there was growing up in her a desolating sense of the awful hollowness of mere verbal profession. The watchwords of her childhood were fast becoming abhorrent in her mouth; and, inasmuch as her best feelings had been rooted in those professions, there was, of course, the danger

lest, in the destruction of those watchwords, the whole fabric might crumble away in the hour of temptation. It was at this point of danger that Miss Lindsay's sincerity and truth stood like a firm buttress, and her honest love like a tower of strength ; there was still truth and faith, because Miss Lindsay was true and faithful.

Mabel continued reading until the act had become merely mechanical—the work of eyes and lips ; and yet it was impassioned reading—the thunderings of Sinai and their warnings to sinners—and her voice rose and fell in due cadence ; but her thoughts stole away to the lover who loved her still, who was dying, perchance, sick at heart, by reason of her faithlessness, and so on to the thought of the desperate cure she had sought to effect, at how bitter a sacrifice !

The thunderings entered Jacob's ears, and for a while he trembled at the terror of the denunciations ; but gradually the new-born thought of jealousy intervened between the sound of Mabel's voice and his own

mental receptivity, and his mind was wholly filled with the new bitterness. As he gazed upon her, fair and comely as she was, though worn with constant watching and anxiety, he swore that she should never be the wife of another man; that, living or dead, no rival should stand betwixt him and her; that the love he had never won, no man should ever win.

The chapter was read to the end; the set task of salvation for that day had been duly accomplished. Jacob said "Amen" fervently at the conclusion. "Tell Mary," said he, "to ask Mr. Simeon to recommend some more books; and mind, they are to ask him to dinner whenever they like, and I'll send down a three-dozen hamper of that fruity port."

"The carpet for Mary's bedroom?" asked Mabel, referring to her sister's letter.

"Hey? let me consider," answered Jacob; "the question is stout Brussels or Kidderminster, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Mabel.

"Let them have a Brussels, if it's for Mary's bedroom; last year's pattern, of course. I don't grudge an extra shilling a yard—she's so good, and writes such blessed letters. Oh, Mabel, may we all grow like her, rooted and grounded in faith!" But his prayer was aimed as a reproach to Mabel.

Mabel never uttered another word to her husband with regard to Frank Foster, but the suppressed feeling rankled terribly in her heart. She continued to perform her wonted duties to the invalid with, if possible, increased zeal and conscientiousness. This service was almost a solace to her aching heart; there was a certain sense of retaliation in heaping benefits like coals of fire on his head. Jacob, however, was only sensible of the comfort of the additional service—he did not guess the motive; and if he had guessed it, he would not have been troubled by the knowledge. Enough that the girl was his slave. She did his bidding and obeyed his behests, and that was suffi-

cient for him. He rejoiced vindictively in his sense of power ; it was a delight to him to think, in the intervals of religious exercises, that with a wave of the hand he could destroy the home at Torquay ; that it was in his power to bind the woman who did not love him, fast and sure, the wife or widow of Jacob Vaughan, to the end of her life.

They chose the new bedroom carpet at Torquay, and they blessed Providence for vouchsafing this new mercy. The patterns were submitted for Mary's approval, Mr. Simeon assisting at the selection. Mary's mind was for a time full of doubt. The carpet chosen in the end was really a very cheerful, well-covered pattern, not too much white in the ground. When it was fitted and laid down, Mary protested with tears in her eyes that she did not deserve such a blessing ; it seemed sinful, she said, to spend so much money for the comfort of our vile bodies. To Mrs. Smith's dismay, Mary presently declared that she would not suffer the carpet to remain in her room. "No,

mother, I was very wicked and thoughtless to have set my mind on a new carpet, a creature of sinful luxury."

"But think of the holes, my love, in the old Kidderminster," protested Mrs. Smith.

"Let the new carpet be sold," said Mary, peremptorily, "and the profit spent in buying cotton drawers for the poor little Barbary Jews."

Mr. Smith's influence with his daughter, such as it was, and it was not very much, was invoked by Mrs. Smith in her despair; but it was invoked in vain. At this untoward juncture Mr. Simeon very judiciously intervened, to the great relief of both parents; he pointed out, in the kindest and clearest manner, enforcing every word with scriptural proof, that Heaven, in its mysterious dealings with sinful men, quite as often tries our faith by blessings as by misfortunes. The carpet was indeed very soft and warm to the feet, plenty of woollen texture (it happened to be the remnant of a pattern piece, and not cut from the ordinary

stock), and after Mr. Simeon's very lucid and forcible exposition of scriptural truth, Mary felt it her duty to acquiesce cheerfully in the blessing ordained for her, accepting it in the light of a merciful trial; the little Barbary Jews retaining their original brown nudity as a consequence of Mary's altered feelings.

"Another proof, my dear lady," observed Mr. Simeon to Mrs. Smith, "of your beloved daughter's spiritual progress; she is gradually learning to consider blessings and misfortunes in the same light; both tending to one end, religious edification." They begged him to stay to dinner. He said, "No." They pressed him earnestly; Mr. Vaughan, they said, would be anxious to learn his opinion of the new port. After a while, with gracious acquiescence, he stayed. He pronounced a very favourable opinion upon the wine submitted to him—stout body, well crusted, with matured bottle flavour, and admirably adapted for autumn and winter drinking. While sip-

ping a second glass (and, as a rule, he never exceeded a second glass, except in very cold and trying weather, and even then under protest) he noted down a list of theological works for Mr. Vaughan. "It is only the true Christian," said he, giving the list to Mary, "who can estimate the blessed state of your dear relation." He finished the glass, and, in a benign spirit of goodwill to all men, left the house.

Mary duly forwarded the list to her sister, together with a letter, admirably expressed, on the subject of spiritual trials, and embodying her own inward experiences with regard to the bedroom carpet.

This letter was not productive of any comfort to Mabel; but Mrs. Smith, who had made a careful copy, lent the epistle to several judicious friends, members of Mr. Simeon's congregation, who complimented her warmly upon the thorough spirit of scriptural piety which it evinced, and finally Mr. Simeon retained the draft with the possible view to a future biography.

Miss Lindsay alone knew what Mabel suffered, and every turn of the affair added to her sore perplexity. One day Mabel placed in her hands a letter from Mrs. Foster upbraiding her for the non-fulfilment of her promise, and she also gave to Miss Lindsay the draft of her reply—heartless, careless, almost flippant in tone.

“But these are lies,” said Miss Lindsay, with a deep sigh.

“They are,” answered Mabel. “But how can I speak the truth?”

“No good can ever come of lies,” urged Miss Lindsay.

“But if I had told Mrs. Foster that I love Frank, that I always have loved him, and now that I know he loves me, I love him a thousand times more than ever, how then?”

“But I say you must not love this man,” answered Miss Lindsay with dismay and alarm.

“But I do,” rejoined Mabel. “I can’t afford to tell lies to you, and I won’t. I do love him,” she reiterated with decision.

"Mark my words. If I ever conceal one jot or tittle of the truth from you in this matter—if I ever gloss my real feelings with a false statement, either to you or to my husband, I shall be inevitably lost, and your power of good over me will be gone."

Miss Lindsay made no answer. Mabel burst into tears. "Oh, my good angel!" she cried, clinging convulsively to Miss Lindsay, "let me have my cry out in your arms. That letter will be sent to Frank; it will certify the truth of his mother's first story—it will show him in black and white how weak and contemptible is the woman he loved so faithfully. That thought is my only consolation."

"What good am I? Heaven help me, what good?" sighed Miss Lindsay, as she pressed Mabel to her bosom with heartfelt pressure.

"You can always give me a kiss," answered Mabel.

"I can and will," replied Miss Lindsay, and she kissed Mabel forthwith. "You are

quite right, my darling, about telling me the truth. But those other lies to Mrs. Foster, I don't like them; better far have said nothing. Depend upon it, the father of lies is always at the bottom of every lie, and he always works a lie for his own purpose, sooner or later—I know that well enough, cunning scoundrel as he is. Let us pray no harm may come of it."

But harm did come of it, although not in immediate sequence. Months passed, and Mabel held faithfully to her task of duty. She read the religious books recommended to her husband by Mr. Simeon. She was either heedless of the words, or, if heedful of them, then with fierce inward protest and feelings of rank rebellion against the lessons they inculcated, and she beheld with terror the spectacle of a selfish heart indurated by religious fear. One day she saw in the obituary of the *Times* an announcement of Mrs. Foster's death, and she tasted for the first time the fruits of her lie in the sad feeling that Mrs. Foster had

died despising her, and holding her in contempt. There was bitterness enough in the taste, but the fuller fruit had yet to ripen. It came to maturity a few months later.

One day, with garden hat hurriedly thrust on her head, with a shawl carelessly huddled on her shoulders, Mabel burst into the presence of Miss Lindsay, who was sitting quietly in her arm-chair perusing the "Brazen Vessel." "I want you, Miss Lindsay," she cried, panting, and breathless with agitation and running; and she sank down on the footstool at Miss Lindsay's feet.

"Yes, my darling," answered Miss Lindsay, "I'm ready!" She laid the "Brazen Vessel" on the table, and kissed Mabel's forehead.

"Don't kiss me—it's no good," exclaimed Mabel, and she started away from Miss Lindsay's feet, and grovelled on the floor. "He's come to England," she muttered incoherently, "desperately ill, dying at Southampton, his friend says."

Miss Lindsay looked right across the room, her glance passing over Mabel's body, and she nodded her head with significant action.

"So you've done it at last, you cowardly beast!" she exclaimed, sternly.

"They thought he would have died on the voyage," continued Mabel, in mournful tones.

"No, no," ejaculated Miss Lindsay, still gazing across the room, "that wasn't your miserable dodge, you scoundrel."

"Sometimes his mind wanders, and then he calls my name."

"Of course, of course," rejoined Miss Lindsay, "of course he does;" and she shook her clenched hand violently.

"And then—oh, my God!" and Mabel started to her feet; her eyes were tearless, and anguish stood written in her face. "When his mind is more itself, he calls me false, fickle, heartless."

"Ay, ay," responded Miss Lindsay, with fixed glance, and still shaking her

fist with anger. "You needn't tell me any more; I understand it all—every syllable, every word. Does he think—that scoundrel, I mean," and Miss Lindsay's voice assumed a tone of scornful defiance—"does he think that Margaret Lindsay was such a fool as not to guess what he was about? Don't let him fancy for a moment that he has taken me by surprise—he knows I told him what his wretched plan would be more than two years ago, and he knows I'm prepared for him now. Hush, Mabel! it's for me to speak. I shall tell him to his face what you were going to tell me. Come to me, darling. Throw your arms round my neck—he shan't harm you; he knows I'm not afraid; he won't dare to touch you when you are in Margaret Lindsay's arms."

She drew Mabel to her, and clasped the girl to her bosom. The enemy had left off skulking behind the bushes, and had come out into the open, and Margaret Lindsay was herself again. She drew herself up to her full height; the blood that had been

shed at Chillianwallah coursed through her veins, and flushed her countenance; the keen, stern glance of her defiant eyes had been the glance of her brother Bob as he parried thrust and blow, and led his handful of cavalry in many a desperate charge on that road to Lucknow. Against the devil and all his power she stood in battle array; the little parlour was a great battle-field, and the hosts of the evil one were gathered to the fight, and Margaret Lindsay exulted in the thought of battle.

“This girl that I love and honour, you wanted to frighten her away from me. This girl that God has given into my charge has come to tell me ‘the man I love is dying; the man I love thinks me false and untrue; he thinks me vain and frivolous, a miserable worldling—he’s going to die with that sad thought in his mind. I can’t endure it, I can’t let the grave close upon that lie; at all cost, no matter what, I must go to him, see him, tell him the truth before he dies—tell him that I love him.

His poor mother is dead ; he is alone among strangers, poor fellow ! in some strange lodging, perhaps without proper comforts—dying alone.’”

Mabel burst into a violent flood of tears, and would have sunk to the ground, if Miss Lindsay had not held her up by sheer strength ; indeed, Miss Lindsay’s own frame was agitated by emotion, and her voice had become somewhat choked by tears.

“Margaret Lindsay is not ashamed of crying. Don’t fancy Margaret is a coward because she cries ;” and then in a sudden voice of exultation she exclaimed, “The battle’s over ! Cold steel, hey ?—you and all your cursed crew routed by a woman. Margaret Lindsay has won the victory, and you know it ! Get out of the room !” she added, in a peremptory voice. “Go, you beaten cur ! It’s all over, darling,” she whispered in Mabel’s ear. “Praise be to God who giveth the victory ! I wish I could sing,” she murmured ; “he hates a

good psalm-tune thundered out at him in a big bass voice as he runs away." She sank down into her chair, still holding Mabel in her arms.

"I'm off to Southampton in another half-hour, darling. I'm going to nurse him, poor young fellow! I'm going to be his mother. I'm going to tell him the whole truth. Tell me his address, and all you have heard about him, and then you shall go home;" and she bent down her head and kissed Mabel.

CHAPTER V.

A SECOND VICTORY.

MABEL returned home in a measure comforted. She knew that Frank Foster would be cared for with the truest care by Miss Lindsay ; that, whether for life or death, it would be well with him in her faithful hands. The fierce tempest of her bosom was indeed lulled, but in the revulsion of feeling an intolerable sense of shame fell upon her as she entered her husband's room. In her dire anguish at the story suddenly told her by Frank Foster's friend, she had almost flung away the chains of duty. As far as purpose and intention went, she had really done so in her hurried walk to Miss Lindsay's house ;

but evil purpose and intention had paled away in the strength of that true woman's wise and merciful love; and though it is possible, under any circumstances, that the evil purpose would have been averted long before execution, none the less did the sense of crime weigh on Mabel's conscience.

Happily, it was still her right to enter her husband's room—still her right to minister to his wants—to soothe the irritability of his afflicted condition—to stand at his bedside as his true and lawful wife. It would still be well with her parents and sister at Torquay—their lives would still be lived in pleasant comfort and peace. The awful danger to which her mad anguish had exposed her, seemed to grow into a visible embodiment of horror as she fell upon her knees at the foot of Jacob's bed, and wept sore tears. In the sense of Frank Foster's well-being, and in the thought of her own recent danger, a feeling of repulsion arose with regard to her old lover, and a feeling of tenderness arising out of gratitude for her

own preservation seemed insensibly to attach her with new bonds to Jacob Vaughan : the pendulum swings to and fro, and the adjustments of the human heart are very subtle.

Even Jacob, who was not gifted with a ready power of discernment, felt in some dim way that Mabel's conscientious sense of duty was irradiated by an unwonted tenderness ; and in truth Mabel's repentance and gratitude for deliverance took the form of a great outpouring of love and devotion.

After a day or two, a letter duly arrived from Southampton, with the address in Miss Lindsay's writing. Mabel intercepted the letter before it reached her husband's room. She detested this concealment, and would have given worlds to have read the contents to her husband ; but she did not dare to do this, and she opened the letter in the solitude of her own room—not with eagerness, but rather with repugnance and shame, and this feeling was increased when she found that Miss Lindsay was enabled to give a fair

report of the invalid, coupled with very hopeful assurance of eventual recovery.

The letter was rather long. It alluded but little to Mr. Foster—designedly, no doubt : its chief matter was an indignant, though not a very coherent, protest—the outpouring of Miss Lindsay's excited feelings. "It's his rascally mean, niggling habits I hate," stated the letter. "I don't mind a big battle, but why must he plague a woman by meddling with beef-tea? I knew he was in the house the moment the flyman plumped down my boxes in the hall. If ever I saw a false hussey in my life, it is this precious landlady. She wore a widow's cap, and she slunk down on the hall chair and begged my pardon, because the Lord had blessed her with many afflictions, and her breath was bad, the stairs in Southampton being always steep. First, her husband had been taken, who was in the sea line, and swore a great deal, though not otherwise reprobate, and then her two blessed infants ; and then the bailiffs who cleared the house under a bill of

sale—though her furniture was mercifully redeemed through Gospel Love; and it didn't become her, as being regenerate, to have roasting done on the Sabbath, though potatoes might stand in the oven without sin, but not meat on the spit with hot dripping for those who look for crowns of Glory.

“He's got her, I said to myself—he's filled her poor soul with empty words, and barren doctrine, and hollow lies; but still I hoped for the best. I told her to send out directly for one pound of the best gravy-beef, and before I went upstairs I gave her directions how to make half a tea-cupful of real essence of beef—printed directions, that a child could understand.

“In three quarters of an hour she sent up a cup of hot water with some grease floating at the top. He's got her, sure enough! I exclaimed—essence of beef is a test that never fails! A liar can't make essence of beef, though a liar can quote Scripture by the page. Poor woman! she's too far gone for my salvation—he's sugared her wretched

soul all over with lying cant and Scripture words. I sent out for another pound of gravy-beef, and I made it myself, and stood over it all the time it simmered, and it's gradually building him up—the Lord's blessing, and that good, true, honest essence of beef, the Lord be praised! And I shall tell him everything in good time, be sure of that; but as for beef-tea, and everything else that enters the house, butter and all—the scoundrel sets that poor woman to picking and stealing, and I'm forced to watch things like a cat; that's why I hate his mean paltry ways.

“ Mr. Foster is, on the whole, a very good and patient invalid—though he certainly swears now and then (I attribute the habit partly to original sin, and partly to nervous irritation through dealing with those rascally Orientals); and I fancy I detected an oath or two, just muttered in an underbreath, as I was reading aloud that dear, sweet tract, ‘ Pots of Honey, or Little Tommy's Temptation.’ But I like him all the better for a

little swearing. I can always get on so well with sinners. I delight in a thoroughly good sinner! it's your 'good' people who always beat me. That scoundrel knows where I'm weak, and when he's bent on worrying me—as he is just now, out of spite—he always sets one of those poor lost souls right in my way, like that miserable landlady. May the Lord have mercy on her, poor thing, for she's past man's help, or woman's either."

Miss Lindsay was a thoroughly good nurse, and fortunately, moreover, she was in that state of buoyant spirits which is very infectious for good in the case of those who are in a depressed condition, physical or mental. She had good reason for being thus jubilant: the long-expected battle had been fought, and the victory was with her. The landlady on her part was very grateful to Providence, for she had never before been blessed with such a lodger; never before had she been able to plunder so largely with so much impunity; prime cuts

of the joint fell before her shameless knife, and the hot meats grew curiously less in the process of cooling. Miss Lindsay had sharp eyes, and nothing escaped her; but she considered these purloinings in the light of petty reprisals on the part of the arch-foe, and in the strength of her substantial victory she could afford to regard them with contempt. She looked upon the landlady, indeed, as a mere catspaw, and it lent a very enjoyable zest to her solitary meals to be able to carry on a fire of sarcastic comments across the table with regard to the diminished food—bread and butter, and meat and eggs, and tea and sugar. She jeered triumphantly at the petty meanness and grovelling nature of her vanquished enemy. “You shan’t worry me,” she cried, with good-humoured derision; “don’t fancy it for a moment; ten shillings a week, more or less, will pay for all your miserable thefts, and as for my essence of beef, I’ll take good care you never meddle with that.” Sometimes it

must be confessed, when Miss Lindsay was more than usually provoked, she paid back her debt in weightier coin. It was irresistibly delightful to her to twit her antagonist on his failure, and deride the impotence of his deep-laid schemes. "So, so, you thought you would have lured that poor girl here, did you? and destroyed her soul, hey? but Margaret came instead, you see. Margaret bothers you, hey? Margaret means to bother you, and she means to keep watch and ward, recollect; so you had best be off with your cursed plots, and leave those two poor souls at peace."

Those who only knew Margaret Lindsay in the ordinary walks of life, and beheld her armed *cap-à-pie* with aggressive determination against the devil and all his lies, did not know the heart of tenderness that beat beneath the armour. Mabel Vaughan knew it, and Frank Foster learnt it quickly, though something of martial brevity, and even a touch of *brusquerie*, always clung to her manner and voice, and her bearing,

erect and gaunt, had much of the military type ; in truth, her tenderness was rather of a masculine nature—that supreme tenderness of men, which is so often linked to supreme courage and dare-devil force.

For some time during his great weakness Frank Foster did not know who Miss Lindsay really was ; he thought, when he was able to think at all, that she was a very skilful nurse hired to nurse him by the doctor ; but, hired or not, he soon felt that her services were beyond all reward of wages. Miss Lindsay was well content to let him remain in his ignorance. She had promised to tell him the truth about Mabel ; but notwithstanding her undaunted courage, she involuntarily shrank from the ordeal.

“I have accepted all your kindness and devotion,” said Foster, addressing her one day ; “I want to know to whom I am indebted.”

“My name’s Lindsay—Margaret Lindsay,” she answered.

“Are you a professional nurse ? ”

"No," she replied, without further comment.

"Then I am still more your debtor," he rejoined, "though money could never pay the debt I owe you. You have come here, you, a lady, to nurse me because I am all alone without any friends;" and tears of gratitude stood in his eyes.

"Beef-tea time," rejoined Miss Lindsay. "The doctor says you are not to talk;" and she abruptly terminated the conversation.

But the ordeal was only postponed to a future day, and the thought of it rendered Miss Lindsay somewhat fidgety. "So you are going to worry me about this business, are you?" she exclaimed one afternoon over her solitary tea-table. "I don't care for half a pound of sugar, or a quarter of a pound of butter either way, or that cold shoulder of lamb at dinner, though it's downright shameful, looking at the market price; but I can see you are up to your cursed tricks with that poor young fellow. You think I'm afraid of telling him the

truth; but I'm not! I tell you fifty times over, I'm not! As soon as he's well enough he shall know everything." Nevertheless, although Miss Lindsay kept a bold front towards the enemy, she really did feel afraid in her heart of hearts. It was her custom to act on the spur of the moment, but she found herself thinking as to *how much* of the truth she might truthfully tell.

The day came at last. She was sitting at his beside; he took her hand in his with such strength as he had. "I want to speak to you—I must. You are always doing some good work for me—I want to tell you the great work you have done."

"Two minutes, not a moment more," she answered; "I can't stay."

"I say, I owe so much to you——" he continued.

"The Lord's blessing, and essence of beef," she rejoined.

"Of course," he answered; "but more than that——"

"Pots of honey!" she exclaimed; "it never fails."

"Your faithfulness, and steadfast kindness," he replied, emphatically. "I had lost all faith in woman's truth—I was in love once, you must know." Miss Lindsay began to tremble. "It was real love, though it began in boyhood. She was the grand dream of my life—she filled up, yes, brimming over, my ideal of a grand woman, though she was only a girl; so good, so noble, so brave, so self-denying. Only a boy and girl, as they called us, but I loved her—God help me!—I never knew how much I loved her."

"Yes, yes," murmured Miss Lindsay, averting her head.

"We couldn't marry, they all declared; of course we couldn't, and I suppose they spoke wisely. Well, the engagement was broken off; we were free. Free! good God! as if I could be ever free—but we were free, they said, she and I, to marry whom we would. I went away to the East. I should

soon forget the stupid affair, they all told me; she would marry some one else, they predicted, and I should do the same; distance and time would assuredly cure the heart pang—a flesh wound, a mere scratch, the wise folks said with a smile. But the cure never came to me; my grand woman always lived in my heart—my star of womanhood always shone in my heaven. One day I received a letter from my mother—the girl I loved was going to be married—a rich old man. I didn't believe it; I couldn't believe it, though my mother had written the words. I went out that day all by myself; I wandered to some solitary place among the rocks—no living being dwelt there—only the limestone, and the purple shadows, and the cloudless blue sky. I cried aloud, 'No, no! not this thing, not this horrible, monstrous thing; she can't! not that man's polluting touch; she can't, she can't!' I shouted till the echoes answered me. I flung myself down on the burning rock, beneath the fierce rays of

that Eastern sun. 'Fool and wretch!' I shrieked scornfully; 'you will try to lure her with your gold; but never, never your wife—never, she will die first; never, in God's name; but *my* wife, mine—mine, in God's sight—God and I there alone.' And in the agony of my horrible thoughts, I clutched the hard rock, and I prayed—I shrieked out prayers, prayers of agony, with the perspiration streaming from me, that this thing should not come to pass. There was no mortal eye to see me; no one to scoff at me, no one to laugh at me; only the hard, burning rock.

"Well, I was a fool for my pains, and my prayers, and all my shouting and shrieking. My mother's next letter said she was married. It was on the very day—I verified the date in my pocket-book—when I made such an idiot of myself among the rocks. I turned almost sick with shame when I read the words; my grand ideal was destroyed, the idol of my life had fallen—the promised cure of my heart-ache had

come with a vengeance, for the great faiths of my life were clean swept out. Ay, I had loved her, once with highest honour, and still I loved her with pity. 'If she must pass through this shame,' I cried, 'let the nobleness of her nature be blunted—let her fine feelings be destroyed—let her be saved from those pangs of self-contempt and self-loathing—let her at least be happy in this degradation.' It was so ordained, mercifully, I believe; my poor mother saw her some time after her marriage—the girl I had worshipped had become worthy of her destiny, revelling in her husband's vulgar wealth. Enough of her; but the loss of her had left me a hopeless sceptic, and with the loss of my mother my faith had gone in women. This is what you have done for me," he said, earnestly: "you have restored some of the old faith, some of the old belief in the old ideals; the true metal has rung out again in your steadfastness, and truth, and devoted care. If I recover, body and soul will have

received their healing at your hands; accept my gratitude, it is all I can give you;" and he pressed Miss Lindsay's hand with all the strength he possessed.

Miss Lindsay vouchsafed no immediate reply. They sat for a while in silence; suddenly, without the slightest premonitory indication, Miss Lindsay exclaimed the word "Beast!" in an emphatic voice.

The invalid started with surprise. "Scoundrel!" continued Miss Lindsay, and she shook her fist in her accustomed manner.

"What do you mean?" inquired the invalid, in hopeless perplexity.

"He's trying to make me tell lies!"

"Who?—pray explain."

"The devil! he's here—here in this room."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Foster, in a state of utter bewilderment.

"Absurd or not, he's here," retorted Miss Lindsay, her face flushing at the invalid's scepticism.

"But I can't see him, or, indeed, see

any one except yourself," objected Foster, with a smile of incredulity, and some doubts as to Miss Lindsay's sanity.

"Of course you can't," rejoined Miss Lindsay in a tone of pitiful contempt; "people in the dark can't see, can they? But he's here for all that. He's trying to make me tell lies, the old serpent—trying to entangle Margaret Lindsay in miserable subterfuges and little fibs; but Margaret means to speak the truth right out, every jot and tittle. Attend to me, Mr. Foster. I'm here nursing you because Mabel Vaughan isn't! I'm here, because Mabel Vaughan is true, and faithful, and noble, and loves you as much as ever. It's all that beast's doing," continued Miss Lindsay, jerking her words into the ears of the astonished invalid. "Why he is allowed to do it I can't tell; why she should be tried through the nobleness of her nature, when there are so many mean, frivolous, false-hearted, lying men and women for him to tamper with, I say I can't tell; but the battle-field is full of

received their meaning at your hands. Express my gratitude, it is all I can give you," and he pressed Miss Lindsay's hand with all the strength he possessed.

Miss Lindsay vouchsafed no immediate reply. They sat for a while in silence: suddenly, without the slightest premonitory indication, Miss Lindsay exclaimed the word "Boast!" in an emphatic voice.

The invalid started with surprise. "Scoundrel!" continued Miss Lindsay, and she shook her fist in her accustomed manner.

"What do you mean?" inquired the invalid, in hopeless perplexity.

"He's trying to make me tell lies!"

"Who?—pray explain."

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smoke, as my brother Bob used to say—my brother Bob who died fighting at Lucknow ; and if we can't see the general's plan, we have our orders, and we must stick to them, and fight on to the end, which is always victory if we fight hard. I *will* tell him every jot of the truth, you scoundrel," she exclaimed, glancing with defiance across the room. "He came to her, Mr. Foster, that miserable serpent, and he whispered in her ear that this marriage was an act of duty, an act of self-sacrifice—he couldn't lure her in any other way ; and she married to buy a home, and comforts, and luxuries for those she loved—not for herself, poor child ; not for herself, I say. She has been a true and devoted wife, God help her ! and so she need be, with that poor miserable invalid of a husband. When she learned from your mother how true and faithful your love had been for her—how her marriage had cast a blight over your life—then he, that vile serpent, whispered in her ear that it would at least be an act of mercy that

you should be led to think slightly of the woman you had lost, and so, at his cursed suggestion, she deliberately asserted her degradation. Can't you see his infernal hand now?" Miss Lindsay exclaimed with emphasis. "Why, man alive, it's as plain as a pikestaff; he meant, through her unendurable anguish at the thought lest you should die with that false belief in your heart, to force her to leave home and husband, and duty and right, and come to you, and shame and wrong—to triumph over her virtue, to drag down her noble nature to perdition. But I was there; I, Margaret Lindsay, was, by the Lord's blessing, sent to baffle the scoundrel, and I baffled him! and I have come to you instead of her—I have come to tell you to love her, and reverence her, and worship her. Up, man, and be strong in this faith; there is balm in Gilead! She is worthy of you, I have shown you that; and you are worthy of her, you have taught me that. You are indeed parted asunder by strong barriers that must

never be broken. So far he has won his victory of impotent spite ; but across that barrier, there she stands, as great as ever, as true as ever, as noble as ever—the woman that you and I love and reverence.”

“ Thank God ! ” murmured the invalid ; and he sank back in his bed, and burst into tears.

“ He’s gone now, Mr. Foster ; he *was* here, indeed he was ! but he’s gone ; he can’t bear the truth, it stifles him, he can’t breathe in it—he can only live in an atmosphere of lies, or a fog of muddled truth, which is just as bad. I shall write to her, and tell her everything, be sure of that ; it will do her good, and I am sure what I have said will do you good also. And I say to you, in solemn, deliberate words, Love her ; don’t be afraid of loving her with that great, noble love which springs up in the heart from deep esteem and admiration—a love which will never be dimmed, and of which, before God and man, you will never be ashamed, as long

as you are both true, and brave, and noble, and stand fast by duty and honour. As I have kissed her, so I kiss you," and Miss Lindsay bent down her face and kissed his pale forehead with a solemn kiss—a kiss of peace—such a kiss of fortitude and endurance as early Christian might have given to early Christian on the road to the amphitheatre. "God bless you!" she murmured as she left him, and she wiped the tears from her eyes as she left the room; but in her heart was the sound of the timbrel and the song of triumph, and so she went out rejoicing.

For several days the landlady marvelled at the ways of Providence, and prayerfully blessed the Lord for the many blessings vouchsafed to her slender larder and her small store of grocery; and she piously traced a very notable analogy between her position and that of the ravens who had so wonderfully ministered to the man of God. The landlady's biblical knowledge was, indeed, very creditable to her spiritual teachers.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS LINDSAY SETTLES IT ONE WAY, AND THE
ENEMY SETTLES IT ANOTHER.

"You're welcome to look over my shoulder," exclaimed Miss Lindsay, contemptuously, as she sat alone in her room writing a letter to Mabel Vaughan. "Of course, I know you will look, whether you are welcome or not; your conduct's all of a piece, mean, contemptible, and tricky. That bottle of old cognac, filled up with water—though I put in a patent cork with a padlock stopper as a precaution against thieving—do you think Margaret Lindsay is such an arrant fool as not to know what good brandy is? I was to give the invalid that stuff, was I? and

she was to drink the brandy, that precious landlady, was she? Every little sup a curse on her soul. Stop you with a padlock, indeed! I only wish one could discover a patent.

“Why can't you try to be a little grand? you are playing for big stakes—immortal souls. That poor landlady's soul; she must have a soul somewhere, I suppose, or you would not play for it; but I can only perceive a stomach, Heaven help her! It's wretched work, though; you were grander once—principalities and powers, and great dominions—I suppose it's the dirty work which has degraded you, miserable beings like that woman, without a single grand hope or a single grand desire, and therefore without the chance of a great temptation. A prince once, recollect; you've had to descend very low to catch people of that sort; you've had to grovel to their grovelling—ground bait and worms for that sort of fishing!—and when one thinks how mean is human meanness, how

small is human smallness, how petty is human pettiness, no wonder that low habits have become ingrained in your very nature.

"It must be poor work, though, fishing for these mean souls; dull, listless sport, this punt-fishing for eternity. No wonder you long for grander natures—my noble girl, hey? and that invalid boy upstairs, who has got the ring of the true metal in him? Never! never! as long as Margaret Lindsay has life and strength. A jewel for your crown, hey, that girl's soul?—grand any way, for good or evil—for good, for good, I say!" and Miss Lindsay thumped the table emphatically. "Come, here are my cards; look at them!" she exclaimed, in a tone of contempt; "all above board, no deceit or cheating, though you'll hardly credit that, when one talks about cards to you; none of your cursed aces under the table, little bits of pasteboard with the crests of hell.

"Listen! he and I leave here on Monday next, eleven o'clock train, Southampton to

Waterloo ; at Waterloo my cousin Rachel meets us—you know my cousin Rachel well enough, and she knows you—so none of your tricks with Rachel, it won't do ; there's the same fighting blood in both of us ; you'd best remember that. Rachel will take him right through to Bishopsgate Station, and then straight away down to Yarmouth. Rachel is as good a hand as I am at beef-tea, and she won't leave her work undone. There, that's the programme, the Lord willing. I return home to Dulwich, and I shall tell my girl all I have done—word of mouth, mind, none of those cursed letters for you to thrust under people's noses, but words of comfort in the ear. You'll listen, of course ; I don't care one button if you do, because I mean to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and I defy you to weave mischief out of stuff like that."

Mabel's letters formed another source of happiness to Miss Lindsay. "Read, by all means," she was accustomed to exclaim, in

her sarcastic manner, as she tore open the envelope ; “ you are quite welcome to read every word, though I’ll be bound you’ve already read the letter, just as you always read my letters, mean hound as you are, over my shoulder as I write.”

With regard to one letter in particular Miss Lindsay was very triumphant, though she read it with tears in her eyes. It was an outpouring of Mabel’s affection and gratitude. Miss Lindsay’s life had been such a stern fight—a life, for the most part, of rebuke and admonition, victorious oftentimes, but as a rule only eliciting respect or even fear—that an emphatic expression of love was infinitely precious to her.

“ You true darling friend,” commenced the letter, “ I only wish I could write all I feel. The sense that you are caring for him and watching him through his severe illness and debility, has taken away that dead weight from my heart ; the assurance that he will hear the truth from one who

will speak every syllable ; the knowledge that he will once more know me and think of me as you know me and think of me— Ah, you cannot tell the relief that all this is to my heart and soul ; the dreadful impulse that maddened me has passed away. Believe me, I am very grateful. Thank God, my gratitude for that salvation has softened my heart. I do really love, I tell you honestly, I *do* love my husband ; he perceives it, I know he does, and we breathe a different air now. No longer, Heaven be praised, am I constrained by that hard, cruel sense of duty, but at last by love. Not, indeed, that great full love of which I have dreamt, but still love, not duty. Oh, if you only knew the difference of those two words to me ; the difference of light and darkness. I repeat, I can't write what I feel, but I shall be able to tell you all when you return, with my arms round your neck, and my heart close to your kind, noble heart."

"The Lord be praised !" cried Miss Lind-

say, speaking through her tears. "Read it, I say, again and again; as often as ever you like—shame upon you!" and she held up the letter, waving it triumphantly like a flag. "We have won the victory! not your jewel, you grovelling serpent—not yours, too good for you!—but His! His gold, tried in the furnace, ay, seven times. Praise be to Him who giveth us the victory!"

It was indeed a victory well-nigh down the whole line, Miss Lindsay's campaign at Southampton. There was just one slight check—it is perhaps scarcely worth while recording the fact—in which the enemy contrived to hold his own—the landlady. In the flush of general triumph, on the moment of leaving the lodging-house—indeed in the hall itself—Miss Lindsay suddenly unmasked a battery against picking and stealing, and petty lying and false speaking. The landlady, slinking down, as was her wont, on the hall chair, into a huddled mass like an octopus, quickly entrenched herself behind strong rocky

fragments of gospel love and carnal regeneration, predestination, and election. She grew very red in the face, and rude also of speech, as far as oppressive wheeziness permitted verbal expression. Miss Lindsay, like a prescient general, soon perceived the hopelessness of her attack, and after firing a parting volley of tracts upon the doormat, by way of covering the retreat, retired to her fly, and they drove off to the station.

It was a bright morning, and Southampton Water glittered pleasantly through the rifts in the pearly sea mist, with yachts and other small craft bobbing lazily at anchor; but Miss Lindsay's eyes were not given to natural beauty, she was, moreover, smarting somewhat under a sense of discomfiture. "Pooh! I don't call that a victory," she cried, scornfully. "I know I was a fool for my pains. I've told you fifty times it's no use my fighting when you've crammed their poor mean, contemptible souls full of lies, and cant, and hypocrisy; but it's nothing to brag about, I can tell you, a miserable,

mean, grovelling woman's soul like your precious landlady's—if, indeed, you can call a stomach a soul."

The journey prospered all the way to Waterloo, and the invalid really bore it wonderfully; not a bit more fatigued than might be fairly expected. The tickets were taken as usual at Vauxhall, and Miss Lindsay was in the highest spirits at the success of her arrangements. "You'll soon see your new nurse, Mr. Foster," she exclaimed, cheerfully. "I'm sure you'll like my cousin Rachel."

"That I'm sure I shall," answered Foster, "if she's only one half as good as you are."

"She's better," rejoined Miss Lindsay—"a better nurse; and as for that fellow, I believe he's more afraid of Rachel than he is of me; she's shorter and sharper with him, and that's what he wants."

Foster could not resist smiling; but when he caught the responding expression in Miss Lindsay's face, he begged her pardon warmly.

"I know you don't believe in him," said Miss Lindsay, in a tone of sorrow.

"I believe in you, dear lady," exclaimed Foster, earnestly. "I know you are good and true, and you have restored my old faith."

"But you must try to believe in him," she answered, seriously, "with your whole heart and soul. You can never hope to be good, or virtuous, or heavenly-minded—you can never hope for salvation—unless you believe firmly in him. Oh, Mr. Foster, it will be a joyful day for me, it will be a happy day for you, when you can say with perfect truth and sincerity, 'I believe in the devil and all his works.' Oh, pray earnestly for this blessed faith—earnestly," she added, with great fervour.

As the train was slowly approaching the platform, a porter thrust his head in at the window, and, addressing Miss Lindsay, inquired her name.

"Lindsay," she rejoined.

"Here's a telegram, ma'am, just arrived;"

and the man handed the envelope to Miss Lindsay. She quickly tore it open.

"Beast!" she exclaimed, after glancing at the contents.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Foster, anxiously.

"Little Billy, Rachel's boy, has got the scarlet fever," rejoined Miss Lindsay, in a tone of great irritation. "It's not the child's fault, of course; it's that scoundrel's work, I know it is. Of course Rachel can't have you at her house."

"I must go to some hotel for the time," observed Foster, somewhat wearily.

"Hotels, fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Miss Lindsay. "Who's fool enough to waste money on London hotels?—'limited,' hey—in everything but the prices? Don't talk, let me think," she added abruptly.

The lines of Miss Lindsay's short cogitation were revealed by sundry ejaculations of "beast," "scoundrel," "hound," "serpent," uttered in a low tone, highly perplexing to the porter, but thoroughly

comprehensible to Foster. At last Miss Lindsay had mastered the situation. "Call a cab," she exclaimed briefly. With the assistance of the porter, Foster was comfortably ensconced in the cab, and the luggage having been evolved by Miss Lindsay's rapid glance from the confused mass of packages, the cab was ordered to drive to Dulwich.

"Don't you believe in him now?" asked Miss Lindsay, triumphantly. "It's all his miserable dodge to bring you two together, the scoundrel! He shan't do it, I say, and that's flat to his face. I shall take you to my house for the time. If he's fool enough to think that a mere question of distance settles a question of right or wrong, why, let him. The gulf of honour which separates you two is not a matter of miles—we shall teach him that; but surely all this knavery must prove his existence to any candid mind."

In her fervent desire to inculcate the evidences of her faith, Miss Lindsay had

almost forgotten her duties as nurse. The invalid had become very exhausted. Miss Lindsay, somewhat anxious, induced him to take a little brandy, and she tenderly supported his head on her arm as he lay back in the cab, with his eyes closed in the doze of exhaustion.

"Weaker than we thought," murmured Miss Lindsay; and perhaps the thought, which was easy enough for her to cope with in the flush of triumph, that same question of distance, was a sickening thought in the heart of the invalid. So close—less than half a mile from house to house—and yet the wide gulf of honour lay betwixt him and the woman he loved.

It was a long, jolty drive. Miss Lindsay sat in the cab with the invalid's head resting on her left shoulder, while she fanned him with the "Brazen Vessel," gathered up like a fan, and there fell upon her at last a certain weariness of spirit. "It's hard work always fighting," she murmured; "and I shall never be rid of the armour

till they lay me in my grave. I wish we were all comfortably dead and buried—ten feet of clean, dry gravel between us and temptation. No, I don't!" she exclaimed, after a few moments' pause, with an involuntary jerk which shook the invalid. "No, I don't, you scoundrel. Margaret isn't half tired out yet. Don't you flatter yourself. Margaret means to fight it out to the last; 'never say die' was Bob's motto, and Margaret means to stick to it."

At last the journey was accomplished. The invalid, after a prompt administration of restoratives, was left at rest on the sofa in Miss Lindsay's sitting-room, while that lady, assisted by the servant girl, made needful preparation for his reception in the spare-room. It was, of course, a work of some little time, as Foster's visit was entirely unexpected. Matters being duly set *en train*, Miss Lindsay, after giving strict injunctions to the servant to watch the invalid from time to time, sallied forth on a double mission—first, to summon her

medical attendant: and, secondly, to inform Mabel that she must be forbidden the house.

"We shall do perfectly well," said Miss Lindsay, tauntingly, in the course of her walk, "notwithstanding the mean trick you have put upon us. Indeed, I rather prefer having him under my charge until he is quite restored. It's ridiculous of you, though, to persist in this manner; you ought to know by this time the stuff those two are made of. It's a loss of time, take my word for it; there are lots of respectable people you could net with one-tenth the trouble. But I suppose it's no use talking common sense to you," she added, with a sneer; "I suppose the fools you've dealt with have taught you obstinacy."

There was some little delay before Miss Lindsay could see the doctor and impress upon him the necessity of an immediate visit; at length, however, she reached Mr. Vaughan's house.

"I shall have no difficulty with her, poor

girl," thought Miss Lindsay, as she waited with quiet confidence on the doorstep: "she will feel the sacred obligation she is under not to visit me for the present; and, thank Heaven, there is now some little real love between her husband and herself."

"Mrs. Vaughan at home?" inquired Miss Lindsay of the man who opened the door.

"No, ma'am, Mrs. Vaughan went out about half an hour ago; she left a message, in case you called, to say that she had gone to your house."

"My house, God forbid!" exclaimed Miss Lindsay, in a voice of terror.

"Yes, ma'am, your house."

Miss Lindsay's breath grew very short: she turned away, and with hurried steps left the door.

"Heaven forgive me! I ought never to have left home; I ought to have written, but I didn't dare write. Oh, you scoundrel! I shall be crazy indeed if you out-general me now. Those two together—oh, the

scandal and the shame!" Miss Lindsay's very strength was lost in her intense agitation. There was an empty fly in the road. "Drive me," she gasped.

"Can't, ma'am," answered the driver, lolling lazily on his box and flicking the flies in the hot sun.

"Only half a mile, for Heaven's sake!" she implored.

"Can't, ma'am, I say; engaged."

Miss Lindsay turned abruptly from the man. "You villain!" she exclaimed, in a towering passion; "don't you interfere between the driver and me; I won't have it."

"Who's a-interferin'?" asked the man, looking round from his seat, in the belief that Miss Lindsay was addressing some one behind the carriage.

"Never mind him," rejoined Miss Lindsay, "only attend to me. Here's five shillings." The man was silent.

"Ten shillings!" There was no response. "I'll make it a pound."

"Jump in," cried the driver, leaping from

his box and opening the door ; " one pound, all square. Be quick though : if my gent catches me taking a double job, he's a very devil, and he's got the gout besides ; but to refuse a whole pound is like flying in the face of Providence."

Miss Lindsay gave her address, and the man closed the door. " Oh, you beast," she cried, with tears of vexation, " to rob me in this barefaced manner ! first that landlady, and now this flyman." But before the driver could mount the box, a loud voice exclaimed, " Fly ! fly ! driver ! here, hi ! what the deuce ? confound you ! "

" Jump out, ma'am," cried the driver in a voice of great alarm ; " I shall catch it hot in another moment ;" and Miss Lindsay was forced, in stress of the driver's terror, to beat a summary retreat.

Alas, there was no help for it ; a tradesman's cart, any sort of vehicle, she would have gladly paid any price ; but she was forced, with palpitating heart and shortened breath, to trudge home through hot sun and dust.

"Mean hound," she protested angrily, "to make me lose all that valuable time talking to that flyman; another of your cursed tricks."

Very hot, very flurried, and almost breathless was Miss Lindsay when she at last reached home; she hurried up the garden path as fast as her failing breath would allow. The French windows of her sitting-room, where she had left Frank Foster, were wide open, the windows through which Mabel Vaughan had been accustomed to enter the house unannounced. A sickening feeling of apprehension clogged her steps. Suddenly there was a loud shriek of anguish—Mabel's voice! She flew to the window, and halting on the threshold, gazed into the room, but she quickly started back in blank dismay. "You scoundrel," she gasped, "this is your infernal work!"

CHAPTER VII.

A DRAWN BATTLE AFTER ALL.

THERE was a pretty sharp tussle in the matter of life and death over the insensible body of Frank Foster. He lay on the floor, and Mabel Vaughan was raising his head when Miss Lindsay entered the room. There was no time for talking or explanation, it was a question of brandy and pungent salts, and rubbings of the feet and bathings of the temples—all hands had to go to work, no matter whose. The servant had to be scurried off to fetch the doctor, “by main force, if needful,” exclaimed Miss Lindsay with determined energy, and Miss Lindsay and Mabel did their best to combat

the onslaught of death. The rights and wrongs of things social, the nice measurings of propriety, had to be laid aside in the urgency of the occasion. There was, indeed, no need of any talking between the two women, for they both possessed common sense and experience, and they worked with an intuitive sense of the right and proper thing to be done. They did well, and death was baffled before the doctor came. When the doctor came into the presence of the invalid, his countenance—Mabel watched it intently—quickly became anxious.

“He ought not to have been allowed to travel,” he murmured. “Let him remain where he is for a time—don’t attempt to remove him to his room at present; he requires careful watching.”

The doctor gave strict injunctions as to the frequent administration of restoratives.

“We can do nothing more at present than keep him quiet?” asked Miss Lindsay.

“Nothing,” replied the doctor.

“Is it a very critical state?” inquired Mabel, in an anxious voice.

“Critical, certainly, but I believe hopeful,” was the rejoinder.

Miss Lindsay whispered a few words in the doctor's ear, and the doctor took his seat at the sofa-side of the patient; Miss Lindsay then laid her hand on Mabel's arm with gentle pressure, but yet with a pressure that was irresistible, and led her towards the door. On the threshold, Mabel turned, and for the moment stood motionless, but she yielded again to the gentle but irresistible pressure, and Miss Lindsay led her into the half-furnished drawing-room at the back of the house. As soon as she was in the room and the door was closed, Mabel broke away from Miss Lindsay's hand, and bursting into tears, flung herself upon the sofa and strove to stifle her sobs by burying her head in the cushions. With simultaneous movement, when Mabel left her, Miss Lindsay fell on her knees in an attitude of prayer. At first she prayed inaudibly,

but gradually, as the violence of Mabel's sorrow abated, she prayed aloud from time to time in fervent, passionate tones. "Oh, Lord, come and help us to do what is right—come and help your servant Mabel, the woman I love, and with great might protect her. You know far better than I do how desperately she has been tried: give her strength to fight bravely against this snare of the devil—give her help by turning towards her the hearts of all those at her home, so that they may in this hour of temptation especially love her, and honour her, and respect her—even as I love her, and honour her, and respect her. Oh, Lord, save and protect her, by putting your almighty love, which is so strong to save, into all their hearts. Let that love be her refuge and sure castle of defence. Amen."

Miss Lindsay rose to her feet, and going to the sofa, sat down by Mabel's side; she clasped Mabel's hand in hers; but she did not speak. Mabel bent down her head, and Miss Lindsay kissed her forehead, but the

wound was too large for the healing power of even that kiss ; and though Mabel threw her arms round Miss Lindsay's neck and clung passionately to her, as it were heart to heart, no balm of comfort was vouchsafed, and Miss Lindsay, with ready perception, was sensible of the failure of the old consolation. She did not, however, attempt to speak, and gradually Mabel, with a deep sigh of despondency, drew apart from her, and sat, or almost crouched, at the end of the sofa. But Mabel could not resist telling her story, or, rather, urging her apology or defence ; she spoke for the most part in a low voice which almost fell into a wail of sorrow, though at times, in stress of violent emotion, her voice reached a high pitch of painful incisiveness. "I came to see you—I did not know, I could not know, that he was in that room, or even in this house." Miss Lindsay bowed her head in assent.

"It was a fearful surprise—he was dozing when I entered ; he never saw me. Could

I help looking at him?" she asked, passionately—"could I help that? God forgive me. When he stirred—when he awoke—I flew behind the green screen. I watched him try to rise—oh, so feeble, so very feeble—try to reach the hand-bell: he would have seen me if I had left the screen to call for help or reach the bell. In the sight of God it was my duty and my right to fly to his side, to help him, to hold him in my arms—I know that; but not in man's sight. I did not stir from the screen—on my sacred word I never stirred. I watched all his efforts: he struggled to his feet—oh, horrible agony! I knew he must fall—but I—I—— He did fall! Oh, my God, his head against that sharp table—senseless or dead—and then I flew to his side. Did I do well?" she asked, breaking into a half-hysterical laugh. "Did I do my duty as a wedded wife? Dead or senseless, I had let him fall—but he never saw me—his eyes never met mine—never, never, I swear. Dead or senseless, the man I love

—the man God meant me to marry, to love and cherish in sickness and in health. Yes, I have done very well—very well!” and many a time did she repeat those words “very well,” mingling them with that sad hysterical laugh.

Miss Lindsay sat gaunt and impassive throughout Mabel's narrative, with her eyes staring for the most part fixedly across the room; she made no response to Mabel's words.

“Betsy Brown is my woman!” she exclaimed suddenly; “first-rate for nursing. I'll write to Betsy at once; Betsy can't read a word, thank God. It's made her senses all the sharper, like blind people. She never went to school or learnt her catechism, but God taught her conscientiousness and truth-telling, so she's first-rate at that. Not many of His scholars about, worse luck. She can't sleep o' nights when she's nursing because her conscience won't let her, which is stronger than green tea. A line to Betsy put into the post before five—she'll get it to-night.”

Miss Lindsay started up from the sofa, and going to the writing-table, hastily wrote off a note.

"You'll just be in time, Mabel, if you look sharp, to catch the five o'clock post; I can't send the girl. Quick though! it's everything to get Betsy. Good-bye, darling, I must go and relieve Dr. Burney;" and with a hurried kiss Miss Lindsay bustled out of the room. She shed some tears when she was alone in the passage. "Poor girl! it's a great burden," she murmured; "Thou knowest why, Lord, Thou knowest why—I don't, I don't!" and hastily brushing the tears from her eyes, she entered the presence of the invalid and released the doctor from his charge.

Mabel hurried off to the post; the office lay on her way home. She reached it almost breathless, and by a few minutes contrived to save the five o'clock collection; and then what and whither? The moment the letter fell into the box, thought began. At first she resolved to go back to

Miss Lindsay's; she *must* see him again; she *would* see him again, no earthly power should stop her; and for a hundred yards back towards Miss Lindsay's house did this resolution hurry her, and then its strength paled away in the fear of Miss Lindsay's refusal. How could she combat that? What if Miss Lindsay told her that it would compromise the reputation of her house—nay, even of Miss Lindsay's character in the neighbourhood? And then the pain, too, that denial would cause to Miss Lindsay's own heart, and Miss Lindsay had been such a true and loving friend to him and to her—nay, was even now fighting the battle of life and death on his behalf. She ceased walking and stood still for a few moments; an equipoise of agonizing doubt. But see him again she must, he was probably dying; surely her husband, when he knew that, would let her go; the man she loved was dying, her husband would no longer have a rival to fear—just a few last minutes, just a few last words on the brink

of death, that was all she wanted ; it was a boon that her husband would surely grant. Let her only gain that permission, and Miss Lindsay would admit her without let or hindrance into Frank Foster's presence ; then let her gain that easy permission without delay ; and so she hurried on once more towards her own home. Her argument remained palpably clear and cogent in her mind until she entered the house, and then quite suddenly its force grew dulled. "Please, ma'am, Mr. Vaughan has been asking for you several times," the servant said as he opened the door ; "and Mrs. Corley has called, and has been sitting with master for some time ; she's only just gone."

Mabel remembered with alarm the long period of her absence ; added to this, Mrs. Corley's visits never boded any good ; and before she entered her husband's room—she did not wait to take off her hat and scarf—the strong argument had grown utterly weak and futile.

"Where on earth have you been to all this time?" Jacob inquired, in a tone of peevish injury.

"Only to see Miss Lindsay," she faltered, with a flushed face.

"I hear Miss Lindsay called to see you."

"We missed one another; and when she got home—I thought it was best to wait for her—she had so much to tell me that I quite forgot the hour. I am very sorry, dear, for having been out so long," she added, humbly, "you'll forgive me, won't you?" but she did not dare to utter one word with regard to Frank Foster.

"What the deuce had Miss Lindsay to tell you?"

"All about her visit to Southampton—and fifty things."

"What did she go to Southampton for?" he asked in a brusque tone.

"Oh—why, I suppose," stammered Mabel, "change of air, you know."

"Hum, well," he muttered, "change of air—no matter; now read. You had man-

aged to forget your afternoon reading with all this chattering to Miss Lindsay, and you know it's a duty, as well as a consolation to me," he added reproachfully. "How you can be so fond of that woman I can't for the life of me understand, she always says something bitter every time I see her; now your sister Mary is always so good and kind and hopeful, and so is Mr. Simeon: I won't have you so fond of that Miss Lindsay—I don't believe in her, I say."

"Oh, Jacob," remonstrated Mabel, "she is one of the truest and best women that ever lived; I'm sure she's always trying to make me good and do my duty. Don't speak hardly of her, don't dear—I beg and pray."

"Well, read, read!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Why don't you begin?"

Mabel, with her burdened conscience, grew alarmed at his manner; she hurriedly took the book and commenced reading. As was her wont, her voice rose and fell with the thunderings of divine wrath, with the forked lightnings of divine vengeance,

with the awful narrowness of divine mercy, with the terrible sublimity of an universe lost for the sake of an elect few. Jacob liked it; they told him his salvation was sure, if he would only believe; he was only too delighted to believe, and he was thoroughly fascinated by the sublime exclusiveness of his promised salvation.

Mabel's mind quickly left the printed words that her tongue uttered by mere automatic action, and the recollection of the past afternoon (she little witted the terrible storm that was brewing beneath her husband's petulance) forced itself into her mind, and the anxieties of her heart fled to that sofa in Miss Lindsay's parlour, to that hard fight for life which she had fought with Frank Foster's head resting on her bosom. At last her thoughts grew so intrusive that they entirely destroyed her power of mechanical reading; in sudden fright, she endeavoured to recover her place on the page; the words danced hopelessly before her eyes, and she burst into a violent flood of tears.

"Ah!" cried Jacob, vindictively, "laid hold of at last, hey? terrible words for the sinner, and the lukewarm, and the deceitful, and the liar."

She made no reply, she tried hard to stifle her sobs; panting for breath, she threw aside the lace shawl which she had not removed on entering the house.

"Conscience, hey?" he said, tauntingly; "touched at last!" and he gazed at her vindictively. "Come here!" he shrieked, suddenly; "here, I say!"

"What do you want?" she asked with alarm.

"Here, to me!" She came close to him, trembling at the violence of his manner. He thrust out his hand and clutched the bosom of her dress. "What's that?—that?" he shrieked.

"What do you mean?" she rejoined in surprise and dismay.

"That blood—that blood on your dress!" She glanced downwards; there were stains of blood on her muslin dress.

"I don't know," she stammered, and the room whirled before her eyes.

"Yes, blood, I swear! Show me your hands." He clutched her hands with violence. "No cut, no wound! Whose blood? whose blood?" With sudden action he tore open her dress at the bosom. She strove to break away from his grasp. "Not your blood! Whose blood?" he screamed, in a fresh access of fury. "Whose blood, I say? I will have an answer, lie or truth!"

"Oh, Jacob, have mercy, have patience with me—not this fearful rage. I have done nothing wrong—before God, nothing wrong!" She sank on her knees at his bedside, and clasped his hands. "God help me now!" she muttered.

"Whose blood?" he cried, with unabated rage.

"Frank Foster's!" she exclaimed, almost involuntarily, and she started to her feet, terror-stricken by the avowal which had been wrung from her lips.

"I believe you!" he shrieked, vindictively; "no lie now—no lie now!"

"He is an invalid; he had fallen to the ground through weakness—he struck his head against the table," she gasped with painful utterance.

"Ah, ah!" Jacob laughed, derisively; "and you took him in your arms, his head in your bosom! So, so, the truth at last!"

"Not the truth—not the whole truth," she answered.

"Truth enough; I want no more."

"You *must* hear it!" she cried, her face growing crimson with horror at the imputation cast upon her. "Miss Lindsay went to nurse him at Southampton—it was a question of life or death."

"Enough, I say!"

"But you must and shall hear me! She brought him to London, having arranged for him to proceed immediately, without breaking the journey, to Yarmouth; the arrangement failed at the last moment, and she was obliged to take him home to her own

house. I never knew he was there—on my sacred word, I never knew it.”

“Liar!” he shrieked.

“No, before God, Jacob, I never knew it! Miss Lindsay called here to warn me not to go to her house.”

“But you went there—you went there the moment he arrived—you can’t deny it—it’s all a trick and a lie—you false, wicked wife!”

“Have mercy on me, Jacob!” and again she fell on her knees at his side. “Oh, not those awful words!” she cried, piteously; “you don’t know how much I suffer—you don’t know how sadly I have been tried. Oh, give me a little kindness, a little love—it would be so precious to me now! Be my true friend as well as husband; help me in this awful trial; let me tell you the whole truth; let me cling to you for advice and love.”

Once more Jacob had his chance. At that moment, as she humbly knelt at his side, amid her tears and her bitter anguish, he

could have won her heart and made her truly his; a very little would have been enough—a little love and a little generosity, and she would have flung at his feet the wealth of her great heart and her noble nature. A woman was kneeling to him, but an angel had verily come to Jacob, and was praying for admission to his heart—praying for leave to love him, and afford him great solace; but Jacob was lashed and blinded by dire jealousy; his heart was, moreover, very small, very mean, very petty—there was no room for a great love or a great faith in that little heart.

“But you love him?” persisted Jacob, in answer to her appeal. “Out with it, I say; the truth, the truth.”

“It would not be the whole truth if I denied it,” she replied, in trembling accents.

“Curse you! I’ll hear no more,” he exclaimed, with renewed fury.

“But he’s dying, Jacob!” she cried, piteously; “ask the doctor—Dr. Burney says it is a most critical case.”

"I'm glad of that," he answered; "before heaven, I'm glad of that." His words were emphasised with concentrated bitterness.

She shuddered, but she made no reply.

"And you'd like to nurse him, hey?" he asked, tauntingly, after a moment's pause.

"Miss Lindsay will do that."

"But you'd like to go and see him?" he added, in the same taunting tone.

"I should, indeed I should," she answered, vehemently, for she could not resist snatching at his words, although she well knew the cruelty of his meaning. "Oh, Jacob, let me go—the last time, a very few words—the last time before he dies."

"Go, pray go," he cried, with increased anger, "you are quite free to go."

"Alas, you don't mean it," she answered, sorrowfully.

"I do, on my soul I do. You can open the street door easily enough. I am lying helpless here—go, I say; but, mark me, you will never return. Well, why don't

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you start?" he continued, in that same tone of vindictive taunt. "A beggar, hey? No money, hey? Ha, ha!—the old man's money bags, hey?" and he laughed with a laugh that pierced her heart.

She had risen from his side; he was quickly driving her mad with those shameful taunts.

"Sister Corley put me up to your lies and tricks. She saw him arrive. She saw you go to the house, and then she came and told me the whole truth. Well—go, go."

The reference to Mrs. Corley was the last weight in the adverse scale. "Mrs. Corley!" exclaimed Mabel, bitterly. "Jacob Vaughan, I take you at your word—I will go. God forgive you, it's your work, you have driven me away." She turned from him.

"Go, and be a beggar," he exclaimed, savagely, "and worse, and welcome. But the Torquay people! What, beggars too? Not a penny of mine—villa and all, sold up, every stick. Go! go!" he shrieked vindictively.

His words struck home, and she sank to the floor without making any response.

“Ha, ha!” he laughed with exultation. “The end of your tether, hey? The chain was strong enough—I knew that! Do you think I was such a fool as to marry a fine young girl like you without a strong chain to keep you in bounds? No, no. Jacob Vaughan was wiser than that. Mark me, you are my wife, and you shall remain my wife, true and faithful, and obedient to the end of my life, and then you shall remain my widow to the end of your life. No new husband shall ever touch my money. A new husband, and the money, every penny, goes away—if you marry, you’ll be a beggar. I’ll warrant the husbands will keep away. Ah, ah! you wouldn’t mind being a beggar, of course not; but the Torquay people will be my trustees, for if you marry again they will be beggars too. My will is sure to be obeyed.”

She made no answer to his words. Their cruelty and their shame indeed wounded

her deeply; but in her firm conviction, Frank Foster was dying, and therefore the threat in itself had no terror for her. The thought of ever marrying any one else was absolutely abhorrent, and utterly foreign to her soul.

Jacob exulted in his triumph. "Come, get up," he cried, "and finish that reading. Obey, I tell you." The victory was assured; she rose at his bidding; she was utterly crushed in soul, and oppressed, moreover, by a vague sense of sin; it was entirely out of her power to make any rejoinder to his words, and she resumed her reading in humble obedience to his command.

There was a lull in the theological thunder—divine mercy and divine love for a short space irradiated the pages of the book, albeit duly circumscribed by special and jealously-guarded limitations; but Jacob could not forget his triumph, and it delighted him ever and anon to jeer at his victim's helplessness, and fling the Tor-

quay threat in all its potency in her face. She kept her eyes closely fixed on the book, and when his cruel talk ceased she continued her reading, and in her own heart she cursed the words of mercy which her tongue was forced to utter.

Miss Lindsay's wise and merciful prayer had not been answered. No saving gift of love from her husband had been vouchsafed to help her. Her own love for parents and sister had indeed made her his slave, but his cruelty had brutalized her soul. The fine ducts and channels of conscience were choked up, congested by a sense of cruelty and wrong. The motive alone of that love for parents and sister, old from the days of childhood, restrained her from turning fiercely upon him, from answering bitter words with bitter words, from defying cruelty and taunt by a scornful acceptance of sin and shame: *à outrance*, in all the strength of her powerful nature, wrought to a pitch of despair.

Presently he called sharply to her.

"Come here, here!" She started up from her chair, and almost involuntarily shrank away from him in the recollection of that cruel grip at her bosom.

"Here, come here—oh, God, the pain!" he cried.

She saw by the expression of his face that he must be suffering intense pain; her anger and her wrongs were instantly forgotten in that sight of anguish, and she flew to his side with anxious sympathy and concern.

"Oh, Jacob! what is it?" She threw her arms round him, and strove to raise him up.

"Don't touch me; don't touch me," he groaned.

"What do you feel?" she asked with terror.

"You've done it," he muttered, writhing with agony; "done it at last. Killed me! killed me! Oh, God!" he shrieked, starting forward, and then he fell back in her arms.

"Jacob, for Heaven's sake, have mercy!" she cried in piteous protest.

There was no answer to her prayer; the prerogative of mercy had been denied for ever to Jacob Vaughan.

She felt dreadfully terrified, but she did not know that he was dead. She flew to the bell, rang it violently, and turned immediately to go to his bedside. She knew then that he was dead; the awful stillness told her that—the awful lull in that storm of passion; but the words "killed me, killed me," echoed in her ears—irrevocable now, ineffaceable by any prayer, final in all their cruelty and injustice—the lips immovable, and the eyes fixed.

"Killed me! killed me!" she cried in her misery; but the dead face triumphed in its stony obstinacy over the fervour of her living anguish, and once more she sank down helpless to the floor.

So Jacob Vaughan died; killed by a violent access of jealousy. The doctors

defined it clearly enough, spasmodic affection of the heart, and the technical phrase they used was still more effective, and sounded fuller in the ears; and their statement was true enough, but there was a truth beyond that truth. He died because he was mean, and petty, and ungenerous. He was literally slain through the very nobleness of the woman whose hand he had bought with his gold. Her nature was too grand for his; the two natures had been flung together, and the greater had destroyed the less.

Dr. Burney told Miss Lindsay, after a second visit to Frank Foster that evening, that he thought the patient would pull through in the end; of course he would require great care and very careful nursing; the sort of nursing, in fact, that he was sure to obtain at Miss Lindsay's hands. This hopeful communication fell somewhat sadly on Miss Lindsay's soul; not that her zeal and energy on behalf of the invalid had in one jot abated, or were in any danger of

abating; but in her eyes death was a very small evil in comparison with sin—indeed, as far as her own feelings were concerned, it meant rest and peace. She felt with sadness that she had been worsted in the fight; that the evil one had out-manceuvred her with his infernal schemes; and it seemed to her that death alone could now cut the knot of entanglement.

“I know what you mean to be at,” she murmured, sadly, as she watched at Frank Foster’s side; “you mean to harden that husband’s heart against her with his mad, senseless jealousy. Fight fair, you scoundrel, and I shouldn’t mind; but you mean, through his hard, cruel words, to drive her to despair and sin.

“Oh God,” she cried, fervently, “don’t let her be tempted in this cruel way! You know how good she is; only let her heart be touched by love, and she’ll never swerve one inch from duty and right. Come and help us, it’s a bad business, and I’m at my wits’ end; only, come quickly, Lord;” and

in the fervour of her heart, and her great love for Mabel, her words were involuntarily uttered in a reproachful tone of impatience. She sought for ready help; and, in her excited feelings, the divine assistance seemed to move so slowly; she wanted it to run.

In the course of the evening the news came to Miss Lindsay that Jacob Vaughan had died suddenly.

There was something awful in the thought, although Vaughan's death was the assurance of Mabel's salvation. Nevertheless, it did seem very awful to Miss Lindsay, in her deep sense of the reality of divine interposition, that the answer vouchsafed to her prayer should be the sudden death of Jacob Vaughan; and she was humbled likewise in the thought, that a doubtful combat waged with her weapons of moral and religious force had, after all, resulted in a drawn battle through the intervention of a great catastrophe—safety, indeed, but not triumph.

It's the Lord's doing," she said, addressing her antagonist; "it's not my victory, I know that. I don't mean to boast—you were running us very close; it's over now, and you can go. His victory, not mine;" and in this spirit, she refrained from all parting shots of triumph at the retiring foe.

"Ah, me!" she sighed; "it's poor thin stuff, even at the best, this human nature of ours; won't stand wear and tear, or even a good hard day's wash, like those rascally longcloths made of mildew and lies. And yet, and yet," she continued with hesitation—for after all, notwithstanding her despondency, she still clung to her faith in Mabel's character, and pondering a little more, the elasticity of her spirit presently returned—"and yet, I say," and she raised her voice so as to be within earshot of the retiring enemy, "I wish the Lord had let us fight it out to the bitter end. I'm not so sure we should have been beaten, after all. Anyhow, Margaret Lindsay

means fighting any day you like, remember that."

"Tell me," murmured Frank Foster, very feebly, "when I regained my senses this afternoon—it's all a daze from the moment I fell down trying to reach the bell—was Mabel in the room, or is it only a wild fancy?"

"It was Mabel," answered Miss Lindsay, in firm outspoken voice. "She was here by pure accident; she came to see me; she did not know that you were in the house."

"Yes, yes," he answered, eagerly. "Will he let her come and see me?—her husband, I mean—only a few minutes; a few minutes. I'll ask no more."

"You must be very quiet; indeed you must," interposed Miss Lindsay.

"Only a few minutes," he urged, with feverish impatience.

"Perhaps, some day. We'll see when you are better."

"Good, good," he answered. "Promise. Only a few minutes, mind."

She was free to see him. The minutes were hers—the few minutes her soul had desired so eagerly. Minutes, hours, days were at her free disposal now; but Mabel Vaughan did not come.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACOB HOLDS MABEL'S HEART.

FRANK FOSTER, as he lay musing in his great weakness, wondered from time to time why Mabel Vaughan did not come and see him, but Jacob Vaughan, as he lay dead in his room, had won the victory, and he held the heart of the woman who had never loved him, triumphantly against the rival she loved so deeply. Mabel was absolutely free from all external interference ; no living person could now control her actions, but there was one large dark spot on her conscience which ruled her with supreme power,—remorse. She knew that Jacob's words were true,—she had killed him.

There stood the grim fact; she was wholly innocent, indeed, of the method by which he had met his death—the meanness of his nature, and not any guilty act of hers; but none the less Jacob Vaughan was dead, and his death, she felt, lay at her door. She only thought of his death, she did not think of his bitter curse of disinheritance—the question of property was wholly in abeyance; it had paled away before the one terrible thought of death and the guilty burden of death.

Alas! remorse and innocence were linked together. “If I had been untrue,” she protested bitterly; “if I had been unfaithful, if he had known it, and it had killed him, I could have been bitterly sorry, I could have repented, and I should have gained peace and absolution at last—but of what can I repent? Is it my fault that my love for another was true and constant? But that love never led me to disgrace or crime, desperately tempted as I once was, and yet, Heaven knows, it was no low or

base temptation, and I was saved, moreover, by Miss Lindsay's love and mercy, and the very knowledge of that temptation was only known to Miss Lindsay and God."

Nevertheless Jacob Vaughan lay dead, and the burden of his death tortured her soul; and yet he seemed to her not *quite* dead, for there was a smile on his face, and the association of that face with life was still warm in her soul—not yet dust to dust, for then he would be manifestly dead—but a strange, intermediate state. Wholly a fancy indeed, but nevertheless a fancy; she lit a night-light to light the locked room through the dark hours of the night—the grace and sanctity of a little light, though the closed eyes would never open again—but if light, then speech, though the dull ears would never hear.

She stood before him in her wretchedness. "Oh God, have mercy!" she cried. "I never knew what a crime I was committing when I married him. I thought I was doing right in thinking of *them*—I had been

always taught to think of *them*—always self-sacrifice from that day when I was a little child, and they made me give the bit of cake to Mary because she was so ill. I married him for their sakes. I have striven to do my duty as his faithful nurse ever since that awful wedding day—kind and attentive and forbearing to the best of my power and strength—all but telling the truth. A lie would have saved it all, when he wrung the truth from my lips. Why not tell a lie, and so have saved his life with lies? And yet no liar shall inherit eternal life! Oh God! I can't understand this horrible entanglement, but I'm fearfully wretched. Why not," she exclaimed, in tones of sorrowful expostulation, "have let him believe in me? I might have loved him then. Why allow Mrs. Corley to breathe those lying stories in his ear—her lies against my truth? Oh God! what crime have I committed that I should suffer all this agony?" And she sank to the ground sobbing helplessly at the dead man's

side. And then came a period of revulsion and rank rebellion—the burning sense of a great injustice fired her soul. She started to her feet. “He knows the truth now,” she cried in passionate tones; “he knows my truth was true; he knows his death came of his own mad jealousy—that it was no act of mine. I won’t bear this burden. The accusation was false. Before God, I say false. If he chose to nurse that accursed jealousy in his soul, it was his fault, not mine. I say, I won’t endure all this torture. No, Jacob, the truth is recorded above. I repeat I did not kill you!” and she gazed down with unflinching glance on the dead man’s face, and in firm words reiterated again and again her denial of his cruel accusation.

A smile had gathered on the dead man’s lips, and the form of the face had turned back to its youthful aspect. Thus we are reminded sadly or gladly of the bright promise of youth—sometimes fulfilled, and sometimes broken? but there had been no

fair promise in Jacob's youth, so nothing had been broken ; and the smile was a cunning, canny, mean smile. It was his answer to her words—his immovable answer, full of mystery, and triumphant in such mystery ; the stuff that had lain in the depth of his nature—meanness, pettiness, small spite, and faithlessness, had come to the surface at last.

His smile crushed her in the end ; notwithstanding all the fervour of her indignation, she could not outgaze its stony fixity. She covered his face with a shudder, and she left him in his triumph with the night-light burning dimly in the silent room, and she bore away her torturing thoughts, to be dealt with in her own soul by hopeless sorrow and the revulsions of angry protest.

Alleviation came the next day with Mr. Barton, the solicitor, and a new current of thought was established in her mind. The will declared that Jacob Vaughan's property was hers absolutely—every penny, and there were many valuable and prudent invest-

ments—and all goods and chattels whatsoever and wheresoever, plate, jewels, furniture, carriages—all belonged to her.

“No, no,” she answered—“impossible. There must be some other will.”

Mr. Barton assured her that he had only drawn one will for Mr. Vaughan since his marriage; in fact, the will against which he had felt it his duty to protest. He had been, as she well knew, Mr. Vaughan’s confidential adviser. Mr. Vaughan had never taken any important step with regard to business matters without seeking his advice.

“No, no,” she persisted; “there must be another will. I know there must be another will.”

“Tell me all you know,” he asked.

“Just before the fatal seizure, he told me he had made a will binding up all his property.”

“People often talk about making wills without taking action,” answered Mr. Barton, still adhering to his own belief.

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She prayed him to search through all the business papers in the house, the desks, all the possible places where such a document might be deposited; she placed the keys in his hands; the old servant who had lived for years with Mr. Vaughan and knew his ways would help in the search.

Mr. Barton took the keys at her request and left the room. She could not accompany him, her agitation was too great for that. What if it should *really* be the truth after all? what if she should really be the sole possessor of all this wealth? Her heart beat with exultation at the thought. "Oh, how glorious—oh God, how glorious to be able to show them what I really am; not the mean, truckling adventuress; not the greedy, selfish wretch they have loved to call me!"

All other thoughts—and be it remembered that a great love was latent in her heart—were merged in that one exulting thought—wealth, so that she might triumph in the scorn of wealth—wealth, so that she

might fling back that intolerable accusation with gifts of gold. Impossible! this triumph could never be hers.

She heard Mr. Barton's step in the passage: she strove to nerve herself for his entrance; and cold perspiration bathed her forehead.

"Well," he said, with quiet assurance, "we can find no other will, and Simpson has opened every possible drawer. I own, I never expected to make any discovery of the sort; all Mr. Vaughan's valuable papers, his will among them, were kept in our strong room; he was most methodical with regard to his papers. I repeat, the entire property is yours absolutely."

Her heart seemed to burst with the very immensity of her exultation: then came tears, and gaining her self-possession with great effort, she addressed Mr. Barton in a firm low tone, clasping his hands as she spoke. "I once told you I would only take under such a will what you thought right and just. I solemnly renew that promise; pardon me, if I speak no more now."

She hurried from the room, and flew upstairs to the dead man's chamber. All, all was hers—hers absolutely! Oh, that sense of wealth, that sense of the power of wealth—she who had been so recently a slave—it filled her soul with a strange, marvellous feeling, and this feeling was mingled with intense gratitude, and also with remorse and sorrow. She kissed his cold forehead with a fervent kiss, her first gift of a real fervent kiss; he had won it at last.

“Oh Jacob, dear Jacob, you loved me, though your words were often harsh; would to God you had known me better, and trusted me in that one thing, as you have trusted me with this large trust. I will deal truly and honestly with all this wealth; not one penny more will I take for my own—that I solemnly swear—than I ought in strict justice to take. Your family shall not suffer one jot through your confidence in me. You have given me the power of vindicating my character from all those

cruel accusations, be sure I shall exercise it to the utmost: they shall say, he left everything to his wife because he knew he could trust her to dispose of it with justice." She gasped all this, rather than spoke it, in broken, tearful words. The smile on Jacob's lips served for his response; you might read it as you chose. In her then frame of mind it seemed to her a gracious smile of acquiescence and appreciation; but this was plainly an illusion—it was, of course, the very same smile which had answered her bitter protest. Take them as you will, smiles are difficult to fathom. Other expressions of the face tell their own tale; but behind the smile of the Belle Joconde, who can read the meaning of Leonardo, that riddle of the Renaissance which centuries have failed to solve? And the dead smile of Jacob Vaughan possessed just as much mystery, only it was the smile of a mean, petty, cunning nature.

Mary Smith wrote a very beautiful letter to her sister upon the death of Mr. Vaughan,

full of pious resignation, at the same time irradiated by a certain subdued spirit of religious exultation. It is scarcely gracious to urge any small cavils against its general tone. Perhaps, if it may be permitted to say as much, it erred just here and there in being a little too didactic, and also a little too argumentative; at the same time, as regards general composition, it was a manifest improvement upon earlier epistles, being far more coherent, less broken by abrupt ejaculations, the style more flowing and harmonious, and to all this must be added a greater force of expression and authority. It ought, perhaps, to be stated that there now existed between Mrs. Smith and the Reverend Mr. Simeon a sort of tacit understanding, or rather an understanding arrived at by the most delicate circumlocution, and this agreement was understood by Mary herself (always be it affirmed in the most humble spirit), that Mary's life should in due course (meaning after her decease) be edited and published by the reverend

gentleman. Mary referred very sweetly to the subject when the bare idea was just breathed by her mother. "I would much rather not," she said, "but if my poor, sinful, wicked life can be made an example of godliness for the edification of the congregation of Israel, I will not repine, I will not gainsay; but I am very unworthy." And this was all she said, but she thought a great deal, and the thought was productive of great consolation and support, at the same time it was accompanied with a becoming sense of deep responsibility. She regarded the subject in a very clear and proper light. "I must lead from henceforth a life of religious biography," she said to herself. "My thoughts and actions must all be shaped to this end, everything that I write, and everything that I say, must be written and said with a view to eventual publication. I must distinctly recollect that the feelings of the present must be shaped to future edification; whenever I address the individual, I must remember that I am

addressing many readers of many editions, if such be the will of Heaven."

The death of a brother-in-law was manifestly a very important occasion—the subject would naturally catch the eye in an index—and Mary's letter was accordingly written with a thorough appreciation of its future importance. A right faith, so it asserted, was capable of supporting us throughout all the trials of life—all the difficulties and doubts of life would surely be solved, and, indeed, probably removed by a vital faith (Scriptural of course). This was the main theme of the letter. Hence it was our duty, above all things, to rejoice in a vital faith, to rejoice greatly, as with tabors, and harps, and sackbuts, and also with shawms, in the possessors of a vital faith. Dear Mr. Vaughan, we were permitted humbly to hope, had been the possessor of that vast treasure. Let us rejoice, therefore, in that one thought—in that one thought let us be thankfully resigned to his death; dead, ere the precious heritage had

been wrested from him by the wiles of the evil one, or the corruptions of this sinful world; yes, darling Mabel, the letter continued, be assured that to the faithful, humble believer in vital religion, the death of your dear husband ought to be heartily accepted with feelings of cheerful acquiescence. Many very aptly-chosen quotations from Scripture were inserted here and there, some were suggested by Mr. Simeon, who very kindly read over the first draft. He awarded to Mary a full meed of approval, and it is just possible that she thought as much of Mr. Simeon's approbation, as representing the approbation of future thousands, as she did of the present grief that the letter was designed to assuage.

Mr. Smith had been an unimportant man throughout his life; as yet we have seen but little of him—in truth, he and the world had never possessed more than a next-to-nothing sort of acquaintance. He stood somewhere in the background of the family picture, among the deep shadows, a few

strokes sketched in, rather than an elaborated figure. If a play-house simile were not irreverent as applied to such a family, he was not even a "third old man" in his own house, but only a first-class super—his wife and Mary monopolizing the leading *rôles*—but his opportunity came at last; the funeral of his son-in-law gave him the leading part.

The sense of his daughter's wealth was a revelation to his soul. His whole life had been lived on the confines of necessity; sharp haggling over shillings and sixpences, until these miserable coins at last attained in his mind the status of second-rate divinities. Hitherto, from their godlike eminence, they had frowned relentlessly upon every humble aspiration of his life, but at last he was mercifully permitted by Providence to stand on equal terms even with golden guineas. It was an effort at first to treat guineas with familiarity, but the habit was acquired by use.

Of course, Mary could not go up for the

funeral, and her mother was perforce obliged to remain with her, but it was obviously only right, nay, a bounden duty, that Mr. Smith should pay all the respect in his power to his deceased son-in-law by attending the ceremony. He was only too delighted to go; he was to travel express, first-class, a fly to the station at Torquay, a fly to Balham, a basin of hot soup, and a glass of sherry at Swindon (first-class refreshment room): These are indeed small items wherewith to make up a sum total of happiness, but the restrictions of Mr. Smith's life had been petty, and small things sufficed for a due enjoyment of Christian liberty.

"A gentleman at last!" he murmured in the depths of his soul. The mourning, too, was so thoroughly handsome and becoming; a first-rate Torquay tailor, no bartering as to price, merely insistence upon excellence—excellence of cut and material being external evidence of internal respect. It was only right he should be resigned, even

cheerfully resigned, but he wanted to be buoyant, he had even to restrain himself in the presence of Mary. But he could not resist confessing to his wife the unbecoming extent of his happiness as he was putting on the new black suit (it really was the very best West of England material). "God forgive me," he cried, and the tears stood in his eyes; "'but the Lord has done great things for us whereat I rejoice.' You know, Jane, that all my life long I have never had a pound to play with, or a shilling to throw away, and here's a ten-pound note, and lots more if I want it; and I'm a gentleman at last, as I ought to have been all along, if I had had my rights."

"Mrs. Smith could not find it in her heart to be angry with him. "Mary mustn't hear you," she said, anxiously; but she too cried, and she felt very happy; it was the first real genuine bit of truth (be it said to their praise that they never quarrelled) that had been spoken in the family for many a long day. Mary duly admired her

father's handsome new clothes. She kissed him sweetly as he was about to depart. "Father, dear," she whispered softly, but both her mother and Mr. Simeon heard her, "promise me to tell poor dear Mabel not to put her trust in the earthly mammon, but only in the heavenly manna."

Mr. Smith promised with a face of becoming solemnity. Mrs. Smith said good-bye at the hall-door, she had never seen her husband look so bright and comely; he seemed to bear the burden of his earthly pilgrimage with an unwonted elasticity of step. Mr. Simeon was his travelling companion; by Mary's express desire Mr. Simeon was to perform the funeral service. Mr. Simeon was nothing loth; all expenses would, of course, be paid; a day or two in London at free quarters—nothing could be more *à propos* or pleasant. Indeed, as regarded the feelings of both travellers, the sting of death had been entirely removed.

It was a most delightful journey. Mr. Simeon was entrusted with the purse, and

Mr. Smith had only to loll at ease on the soft cushions of the carriage, and be thankful to Providence for so many blessings mercifully vouchsafed. The small corruptions of sixpence and a shilling had altered the whole tenor of life—they touched their hats to him, did guard and porter, and bustled about to fulfil his behests; Mr. Simeon, too, showed him an unusual amount of kind attention and consideration. It was indeed almost too much for the Christian humility of his heart to endure, and from time to time, as he looked back on the arid pilgrimage of past years, he could not resist shedding tears of thankfulness. Mr. Simeon very naturally attributed these tears to a wrong source, and he very graciously poured in the balm of an ineffective consolation—prescribing Christian resignation for joy of soul.

But, after all, the day of the funeral was the great day of Mr. Smith's life. He got through it with some difficulty; he was wonderfully and mercifully supported, or

else he must have broken down ; speaking carnally, he certainly would have broken down if the undertaker had not behaved like a son to him—so considerate, so specially deferential ; indeed, everybody was the same ; Jacob's old servant was attention itself ; the man felt that his late master's death had once more placed him on his probation, and he was most anxious to obtain a good word from Mr. Smith on his behalf. Then, too, the relations who had been asked to the funeral (Jacob had left particular directions, written in moments of irritation against his sister, Mrs. Corley, that her husband should not be asked to attend) were exceedingly civil and deferential to the father of the possessor of the property, concealing their bitterness by politic behaviour.

Again, the funeral was in itself eminently satisfactory, thoroughly handsome, thoroughly well equipped at all points ; indeed, it seemed almost worth dying, to be buried in such a truly effective style,

and Mr. Smith, on his daughter's behalf, was chief mourner, and held the first place in the elaborate ceremony. The undertaker was a man of great discernment, and had understood the situation at a glance.

"Of course the widow would wish every respect to be shown to the late Mr. Vaughan?"

"Of course," was the reply of Mr. Barton, who was anxious very kindly to save Mrs. Vaughan all the trouble he could.

That assent was *carte blanche* to the undertaker for a substantial display of funereal grief. Restrictive stint would have been an outrage on the sanctity of human feelings. There was no stint, therefore; everything was good and genuine (as far as things are good and genuine in these days), and in great plenty. Crape scarves, rich Lyons silk scarves, the very best goods in the market, and cut to full lengths. Above all, and this was a most important point, a point upon which Mary Smith had been most emphatic in her letters, it was

a thoroughly Protestant funeral. Not a single trace of popery could be discovered by the most evangelical eyes—not the slightest taint of ritualism. Still, there must be some ornamentation nowadays, and no exception could be taken to metal serpents, nicely burnished, and upturned torches, but beyond this permitted licence of decoration, absolutely nothing of an unscriptural nature could be detected. Workmen are so careless, however, and they make all these metal emblems, or ornaments, as you may choose to call them, at Birmingham by the gross, and just because a cross came to hand, the workman thoughtlessly nailed it on, but the mistake was fortunately detected at the last moment, and a serpent used in substitution.

Viewed as a whole, in the light of a work of art, the effect of the funeral was perhaps somewhat monotonous—possibly this result is unavoidable in elaborate funerals, because the multiplication of mutes, and staves, and plumes, and vulgar faces of perfunc-

tory solemnity must tend to monotony—but still it was an impressive and solemn monotony. The display of feathers was very remarkable. Wherever feathers could be introduced, there were feathers, nodding on horses, hearse, coaches—nodding on a large tray, borne by a portly man of tried solemnity in the front of the procession, whose face was invaluable for striking the keynote of solemn grief—a drum-major in the march of death. Why that affluence of feathers? and what the moral and æsthetic effect of feathers upon the soul of man?—who shall attempt an explanation? Whether as evidences of an outpouring of grief, and if so, how? Whether as emblems of something or the other, say, of the vanity of human aspirations—whether typical of the soul or the body, or not typical at all—but in any event, even if irrelevancy be finally admitted, those feathers were deeply impressive, for the mystery of the irrelevant is perpetually interesting to the souls of men. May we, therefore,

all die to be buried like Jacob Vaughan, in the odour of affluent respectability. Alas ! many a poor soul which has put its earthly trust in foreign bonds, infidel and otherwise, cannot at this period of depression, place its trust in that hope. May we, therefore, all live until better times have restored the old balance to the banker's account.

Mr. Smith returned home to his daughter's house, thoroughly satisfied with all that had occurred, and in a state of cheerful, though of course chastened spirits. It must be remembered that the great satisfaction of the day dwelt in its complete sanctification ; if it had been a question of a dinner party—a ball would be of course out of the question—or even an ordinary tea party, without supper, with merely cake and a glass or so of sherry as a finale, a sense of sin through worldliness would have been created ; but the solemnity of a funeral did away with all taint of evil, and left the soul free for the temperate enjoyment of creature blessings. Mr. Smith presided

at a most handsome luncheon after the funeral; everything of course was cold, but thoroughly good and substantial, with excellent flavour, and duly set out with all possible appliances of costly plate; one raised pie in particular was productive of much inward satisfaction, and a rich and well-matured golden sherry, from Jacob Vaughan's favourite bin, blended most admirably, in Mr. Smith's mind (and Mr. Smith was a very temperate drinker), with the solemnity of the occasion, lending a sanctified halo to the pleasant sense of money value which pervaded the various articles of furniture (of the best workmanship), and this grateful halo finally deepened into a sort of rich chiaroscuro of thankfulness for all temporal blessings. Indeed, never before in all his spiritual experiences had Mr. Smith attained such an absolute condition of supreme resignation to the will of Heaven.

Mr. Simeon was deeply affected by this touching evidence of his aged friend's

spiritual strength. He had witnessed his tears in the railway carriage, and he now beheld his happy triumph over earthly afflictions and sorrow through a truly sanctified resignation. "Sorrowing not as without hope," he said, with due solemnity of voice, and he took just one last glass, the fourth, be it said, of that excellent sherry. "Not sorrowing as worldlings sorrow, whose hearts are filled with earthly things—would that your poor afflicted child could be brought to that happy state of chastened resignation which you are so mercifully permitted to enjoy."

"Amen," answered Mr. Smith, with tears in his eyes, and he helped himself to one last half-glass as Mr. Simeon passed the decanter. It was, indeed, the happiest day of Mr. Smith's life, and he always remembered it with sincere gratitude and an unfeigned sense of spiritual unworthiness; it was, indeed, the only one opportunity of earthly distinction which Providence had meted to him in the course of his long life,

and he had the satisfaction of feeling that he had acquitted himself on the whole in a very satisfactory manner.

Mr. Simeon would gladly have afforded spiritual consolation to Mrs. Vaughan, but her sorrow, and her remorse, and her great and constant love, even if he had been aware of the true state of her feelings, would have been mysterious beyond his comprehension. His efforts were therefore fruitless.

Her father's love, on the other hand, if it failed to heal her wounds, at least soothed her by its sympathy. His knowledge of her nature was quite as limited as Mr. Simeon's, but the true love of his heart touched her, as the inarticulate but inexhaustible love of a dumb animal, touches the heart of man by its sheer affluence of affection.

Miss Lindsay did not entirely understand Mabel; she naturally thought, as soon as propriety permitted, that Mabel would desire to see Frank Foster, and that long before propriety did permit, she would yearn for the coming of the permitted day.

But the very thought of Frank Foster was abhorrent to Mabel's soul—it was mingled with a sense of remorse and a sense of ingratitude; but for his existence she might have really loved the man who had dealt so handsomely by her; but for his existence she would now be free from that torturing feeling of remorse, and that anguish of ingratitude; but yet her own heart deceived her, for she really loved Frank Foster with all the strength of her strong love; she thought, indeed, very much about him, although the thought was mingled with repulsion; she thought, in any event, that he must scorn her for her marriage; she had been faithless, palliate it as she might, and his faith in her could nevermore be rekindled.

“I shall never marry him,” she said abruptly to Miss Lindsay. (Miss Lindsay had just assured her of Frank Foster's slow but favourable progress.)

“Not just now, of course; not directly,” answered Miss Lindsay.

"Never, never!" was the emphatic rejoinder.

Miss Lindsay replied with a smile of incredulity.

"I say, never, never," reiterated Mabel, nettled by Miss Lindsay's doubt. "Besides, how could I, if I would? Do you think a man like Frank Foster would stoop to ask me now? Do you think I should stoop to ask a man to marry me?"

"I don't know how, but at the proper time I do know you will, and I do know you ought," rejoined Miss Lindsay, with decision. "I tell you he loves you. I make no mistake as to that."

"Let us cease this useless talk!" exclaimed Mabel, her heart beating violently. "By the way," she asked, "has he received that arrear of salary?"

"He hasn't," answered Miss Lindsay, "the firm is in difficulties."

"But he must be in want of money," urged Mabel.

"He doesn't want money just now,"

replied Miss Lindsay; "he's far too ill to spend money: besides, he's my guest, my invalid——"

"You darling woman," cried Mabel, in a burst of gratitude—and she threw her arms round Miss Lindsay and kissed her; "you dear creature, but you can't afford all this expense; you ought not to afford it, all that expensive time at Southampton, all this time now."

"I can afford it," answered Miss Lindsay, bluntly.

"But you mustn't, you mustn't! you have fifty other calls for your money. I am so rich, money is nothing to me now. I must pay for everything; he will want a change of air when he gets better. I can never marry him—but—what's the use of money if I can't spend it as I like? I am going to give away a great deal to Mr. Vaughan's family: it's my duty to do so. I don't care for money, you know that, but he must have all he wants—he must, he shall."

“No, Mabel,” answered Miss Lindsay, with decision. “I love that young man; he’s got the true metal in him. I say he mustn’t, and I say he shan’t, touch one penny of Mrs. Vaughan’s money while I’ve got a penny to help him with.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SIMEON COUNTS THE COST OF
CANONIZATION.

THE concurrence of Mr. Simeon and Mrs. Smith, together with the acquiescence of Mary herself was not sufficient to ensure the saintship of Mary Smith. The question was ultimately decided in a little room in the neighbourhood of Paternoster Row. There is a human process in all things. The production of a Protestant saint is a question of pecuniary profit—will it pay? is the query for solution. The publisher, or more strictly the publisher's reader, dealt with that essential question in the aforesaid little room. After all, it does not so much

matter how things are done, provided that they be done in the end. A Roman saintship may be advocated before a council of cardinals, and the affirmance may represent a question of church policy; to wit, a dream of French bayonets and the wild hope of a reaction, might one day make a saint of Joan of Arc, and so, somehow or other, you acquire your saint. Our methods are different from the Italian; the assent of a publisher, and not a conclave, is the method by which a Protestant saint is furnished to the religious world, or rather a section thereof, in England. In this land, canonization is a printed book; and a printed book, be it remembered, represents the cost of writing, of editing, of printing, of binding—sometimes in fancy boards with emblematic devices stamped in gold; to this may be added the necessity of a frontispiece, usually an old man with a prominent Bible, a sunset, and an invalid girl in a high-backed invalid chair, together with a vignette on the opposite page—say, a grave,

with headstone backed by another setting sun; but all these things cost money—a contingency of profit and a contingency of loss.

It is said that tea tasting is a valuable and special gift; that a marvellously delicate and appreciative touch is necessary in estimating the value of raw silk; that some few noses of exquisite organization can detect the particular sherry of a given shipper without the assistance of the palate; that some connoisseurs of china can tell the difference between Bristol paste and Dresden—both hard pastes, be it remembered—by handling specimens behind their backs; but, after all, the man who could tell to the nicety of a pecuniary estimate, the receptivity of the public for a work of literature or for a play, would represent a greater wonder—nay, alas, an impossibility—an ideal at best only capable of approximate realization; given a clever mind, capable of estimating the value of a clever work and the area of clever persons to

which it would be applicable, could that same mind be capable of gauging the merit of a work of inanity and its value in the area of the inane? And yet inanity requires its literature and its plays, and pays handsomely for both; but for the purpose of a thoroughly critical appreciation, we require a clever mind, and yet, with all its cleverness, it must be distinctly capable of suffering fools gladly; a mind not warped, or irritated, or outbalanced by inanity, but capable of calmly estimating inanity to the market value of a fraction. How inestimably valuable to publisher and manager would be the existence of such a mind. The value of the inane is constantly overlooked, and much good money is thereby lost. We crane after the birds, and we walk over the hares crouching in the swedes at our feet.

Before seriously devoting himself to the biography of Mary Smith, Mr. Simeon, with very commendable prudence, during his visit to London (and a decidedly judicious

tone of mind was visible as well in his theology as in the general tenor of his life), consulted a gentleman connected with the world of religious literature with whom he had had some small literary dealings. Mr. Enos Hard, the gentleman in question, was a man of profound scientific acquirement, and great scientific enthusiasm, his faith decidedly tending towards a materialistic *cultus*. His well-known scientific reputation had frequently caused him to be consulted by publishers of scientific works. The advice he gave was invariably wrong, his enthusiasm entirely warped his judgment and misled his conclusions. On the other hand, with regard to the value of religious publications his advice was unrivalled—his feelings in this respect never blinded his eyes to facts or perverted his deductions. He roughly knew to within a few pounds the market value to be derived from each section, and almost each sub-section, of the religious world, and he was thoroughly acquainted with the exact amount of litera-

ture which each division was capable of absorbing in the course of a year; and he knew, moreover—and this was a most necessary item of knowledge—the exact publishing price adapted to each section. Thus, there was a high-church price, and a low-church price, and a dissenting price; the error of even a shilling either way being capable of destroying, or largely damaging, the value of a book in other respects thoroughly applicable to a given class of readers. The pursuits of our lives and the pleasures of our lives are oftentimes at strange issue; the business of Mr. Hard's life was the perusal of religious manuscripts, the enthusiasm of his leisure moments was the ultimate evolution of mind out of matter.

The great triumph of Mr. Hard's literary career was the success of the "Brazen Vessel." This publication had been the ruin of at least two religious enthusiasts; the third proprietor had in desperation invoked the aid of Mr. Hard as editor. It

was a most fortunate selection ; after a few months of judicious management, the circulation increased to a surprising extent, and a thoroughly satisfactory pecuniary result was attained. But alas, this triumph of Mr. Hard's intellectual power was chequered by the failure of his work of love—a small weekly physiological *brochure* entitled, “Matter, a Journal of Mental Progress and Psychological Research.”

Mr. Hard derived a considerable honorarium from the “Brazen Vessel,” but in his wild enthusiasm he flung away every penny upon his unfortunate bantling. It was all in vain ; thanks to his unrivalled knowledge of the religious world, the “Brazen Vessel” prospered to his inward mortification, and, notwithstanding his great scientific acquirements, “Matter” limped languidly along, to his intense sorrow. Mr. Hard's intellectual workshop was the small room aforesaid in Paternoster Row. He possessed a thoroughly useful and most comprehensive theological library, together with all the

newest works on science. He read his manuscripts at a sort of table-desk, backed by two or three deal shelves full of test tubes and spirit lamps—it was at best a rough-and-ready sort of sanctum, for Mr. Hard did not value the sentiment of fine furniture, and his friendship for dust and litter almost verged on the tenderness of love.

The sanctum had its special odour too, because the process of evolving mind from matter in the test tubes, was attended with a certain slight smell, and this odour was combined with whiffs of sulphuric acid and methylated spirits, because some of the test tubes required to be boiled, some treated with acids, and some indeed iced. Oftentimes, in the midst of perusing a fiery treatise in defence of the Mosaic Cosmogony for the use of this or that section of the religious world, did he raise his anxious eyes to those test tubes, if haply the origin of life might be visible in the residuum of his combinations of nerve fibre, and tissue, with heat, acid, and cold.

Although Mr. Hard believed very little in the various theological works which he perused, yet he was the instrument providentially selected to enlarge the restricted limits of Mr. Simeon's Christian love. Mr. Simeon attended Mr. Hard by appointment. Mr. Hard was a rigid economist of time, and talked with great terseness.

"I've got some work for you," said Mr. Hard, breaking violently into the midst of one of Mr. Simeon's round sentences, "a ritualistic story—I want you to edit it for Broadband's house."

"But Mr. Broadband is a low-church publisher," exclaimed Mr. Simeon with surprise.

"Of course, of course," interrupted Mr. Hard impatiently.

"And my own principles are soundly evangelical," objected Mr. Simeon.

"That's why I want you to edit it—it's a capital story. 'Surplices' would have accepted it at once, only they are full for this season with high-church stories.

Broadband isn't, and he want's something good—he pays well for what he wants."

"But how can I edit a high-church story—consider my conscience," responded Mr. Simeon with regret, for Mr. Broadband's liberality was well known in the world of religious literature.

"Bless the man," cried Mr. Hard pettishly. "It's boiled over," he exclaimed ruefully—and at the same moment he blew out a spirit lamp.

"What has boiled over?" inquired Mr. Simeon sympathetically.

Mr. Hard did not vouchsafe any reply, but he shook his head sadly, for the fifty-first time the mental principle had eluded him by boiling itself away. With an exclamation of vexation, Mr. Hard turned from the test tubes. "Don't you understand, I want you to alter that ritualistic story into a low-church tale?"

"How can I do that?" asked Mr. Simeon in blank astonishment; "what, turn a story inside out?"

"Not a bit inside out," retorted Mr. Hard with impatience; "leave the story just as it is—read through the manuscript carefully, and wherever you read 'works' write in 'faith'—substitute frames of mind for crosses—alter the quoted texts—action to resignation, objective to subjective—and the thing's done. Ah, by the way, you must write a preface, showing that the narrative illustrates in a very remarkable manner the fruits of a sound protestant and scriptural faith."

"If that's all," said Mr. Simeon with alacrity, "I shall be very happy to undertake the good work."

"All right," responded Mr. Hard, and he turned intently to the test tubes.

"I was anxious to inquire," said Mr. Simeon, "whether there is any room just now for a religious biography?"

"A drop or two of nitric acid," murmured Mr. Hard, absorbed by pending experiment.

"I was venturing to inquire as to religious

biography," repeated Mr. Simeon with some embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon," answered Mr. Hard, "just one moment. Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't speak!" he exclaimed anxiously.

Some invocation or the other is almost a necessity to mankind. Mr. Hard still retained his use of the old forms of invocation—in a measure, of course, out of deference to the profession of his visitor, but mainly because he had not yet succeeded in framing a satisfactory and terse form of invocation, out of the potentiality of an aggregate of globules.

Mr. Hard seized the bottle of acid—two drops at the utmost—his hand quivered with excitement—alas, three drops fell, and the mental principle, instead of being duly developed, was destroyed by the excess of acid. It must be in truth confessed that Mr. Hard was a very indifferent experimentalist—his nervous anxiety to verify a foregone conclusion constantly interfered with the success of his investigations. He

shrugged his shoulders with impatience—he would have sworn, but he did not, partly on account of his visitor, and partly on account of the impersonality of globules. “What were you saying?” he inquired brusquely of Mr. Simeon.

“As to a market for a religious biography,” and Mr. Simeon proceeded to open the subject in his somewhat inflated style.

After a few moments of impatient listening, Mr. Hard again burst into the centre of the subject. “A small fortune if you hit the right nail! Low church section, good! Only give us a new ‘Dairyman’s Daughter’—money to a dead certainty—make it middle-class piety, if possible; that’s your market, remember; and buyers like a reproduction of their own experiences. Simple language of course, the simpler the better—as many texts as possible, crammed in anywhere—stick to inactive resignation—active piety is always troublesome in small households—it upsets the meals and worries the cook and housemaid—hits here and

there at Rome and the ritualists, it gives a piquant relief. Small octavo, three-and-sixpence, green cloth, nicely lettered— young girl of course, must die young— consumption if possible. Torquay a very good locality—or Bournemouth would do— must be published as a Christmas book— religious world always buys at that period out of protest against secular literature at the bookstalls in blazing colours. Good-bye —knock off that story and preface—sharp, mind.”

Mr. Simeon retired thoroughly satisfied, with the MS. in his pocket, and Mr. Hard turned to his test tubes; but the saintship of Mary Smith was secured, albeit in a sort of hurried parenthesis, but somehow matters of the gravest import are often turned out topsyturvy in the turmoil of life.

Mr. Simeon performed his editorial task admirably. By the skilful omission and addition of a very few words, the religious tone of the story was entirely transformed. Mr. Broadband was delighted, so also were

many readers belonging to the lower section of the church, and a certain section of dissenters. The story indeed proved a great success, and the religious periodicals attached to those sections affirmed, that the narrative afforded a remarkable illustration of the value of a thoroughly sound evangelical faith.

Mr. Simeon received his cheque gladly, and his editorial work opened to his mind a slight suspicion that moral excellence *might* be the outcrop of other forms of faith than his own. He made no open affirmation on the subject—he could not indeed, with prudence, afford to do so, having regard to the pew-rents of his chapel and the size of his family—but still it was a certain spiritual advantage for him to suspect that perhaps (only perhaps) Christianity might be a larger thing than the rigid faith of a limited body of English religionists.

CHAPTER X.

SHALL FOSTER RETURN TO TIFLIS ?

A DAY or two after Jacob Vaughan's funeral, Mabel accompanied her father and Mr. Simeon to Torquay. Mr. Smith, it may be mentioned, was not quite so cheerful on the return journey as he had been on his journey to London : possibly a sense of the coming abridgment of his brief social prominence cast a shadow on his spirits, but nothing could exceed his tenderness and devotion to his daughter. Mr. Simeon, too, was most attentive. Mabel was indeed a most attractive person in his eyes ; her conversion would be a great spiritual feather in his reputation ; and good sound white paint, three coats flatted, bestowed upon his chapel

of ease, would constitute a very reasonable thank-offering for regeneration: the first fruits, but not the last, of a new spirit.

Mary's solicitude on behalf of her sister was very sincere and heartfelt. Mary viewed the matter in her thoroughly sensible manner, combined, of course, with strong evangelical feeling. Poor Mabel had indeed suffered a very great and irreparable loss, but that sorrow, regarded in a religious spirit, would speedily be converted into a chastening blessing. Mary's chief anxiety, therefore, was with regard to the great burden of wealth which Mr. Vaughan's will had cast upon her sister. Hitherto the temporal afflictions of Mr. Vaughan had prevented Mabel from becoming a mere worldling, but the removal of Mr. Vaughan to a better country (so at least she humbly trusted) would open to worldliness a free access to Mabel's soul. Mary felt that it would be her bounden duty to combat this temptation to the best of her ability.

So Mary held her medicine in readiness

for the treatment of her sister's presumed weakness; strong tonics, wholesome but bitter to the taste. Alas! we are blind doctors of the soul. Mabel needed no such medicine.

"You need not fear my growing worldly," Mabel protested one day in some weariness at her sister's discourse, but still in a thoroughly kind tone.

"We must remember, darling," answered Mary earnestly, "we are all poor, weak children of sin—and riches are a great temptation."

"Yea, eating up the very marrow of the soul," observed Mr. Simeon, who happened to be present.

"I think I can convince you that you need not be anxious for me on that score," continued Mabel. "I will talk to you in confidence. Mr. Barton tells me roughly, as far as he is at present able to estimate the value of the property, that I shall possess about ninety thousand pounds under Mr. Vaughan's will."

"The Lord has indeed dealt very mercifully—blessings heaped up, and overflowing!" exclaimed Mr. Simeon, astonished at the magnitude of the estimated sum. "Oh, my dear lady, let me pray you to spare a small portion of this great gift, say a tithe, a tenth of what you possess, for the Lord's vineyard."

"I am going to give away much more than that," answered Mabel quietly; "I am going to act upon the assumption that Mr. Vaughan died intestate. I am going to take for myself what the law would award to me under such circumstances."

"The strength of sin is the law," involuntarily ejaculated Mr. Simeon, with a certain feeling of dismay.

"Namely, one-third of the gross sum," continued Mabel; "the remainder I shall divide as I choose between the next of kin."

Both Mary and Mr. Simeon started with astonishment.

"But are you sure that this is quite right?" asked Mary with much concern.

"Quite right; so my conscience tells me," answered Mabel.

"We should all pray earnestly to be directed in such matters," continued Mary. "I do not understand carnal business, but I am sure in all things we ought to do nothing rashly, but everything to the glory of the Lord."

"Amen!" responded Mr. Simeon in solemn tones.

"Mr. Barton says I am quite right," rejoined Mabel.

"But Mr. Barton is only a carnal adviser," objected Mary; "I am sure, darling Mabel, you require in this serious affair spiritual advice and counsel. The gifts of the Lord are very gracious—yea, like precious dew on Hermon, and they ought not to be lightly squandered away."

"Amen!" again responded Mr. Simeon, with decided approbation.

"You must remember, dear Mabel," continued Mary, with increased earnestness, "that riches have probably been bestowed

upon you for some great object—that object, when discovered, will become a great duty—I ask very fervently that you may be mercifully saved from committing a very grievous error, by divesting yourself of the power of performing that great duty when the hour comes; we ought always, dear Mabel, to watch and pray.”

“It is our bounden duty to remember,” urged Mr. Simeon, assuming a decidedly pastoral tone, “that when the hour came the foolish virgins had no oil in their lamps. Now what is scripturally termed ‘oil’ may be held to signify, as a figure, the earthly medium by which we perform spiritual good. It may indeed be right at certain periods to give away this precious oil, especially unto those who are of the household of faith—but we should prayerfully seek for the right time to perform this important act, and instead of consulting worldlings, we should rather consult those who are indeed foolish as babes and sucklings in the knowledge of this world, but are wise in grace and truth.”

"Yes," added Mary, "we must endeavour to bridle the carnal impulses of the heart by a truly humble and religious spirit, and a sober, devout, and prayerful judgment."

The subject dropped, but neither Mary nor Mr. Simeon again referred to the sin of worldliness in their spiritual conversations with Mabel.

In the midst of love and solicitude, Mabel pined sadly for consolation and sympathy. One day a letter from Miss Lindsay informed her that Frank Foster intended to return to Tiflis; his employers, owing to their difficulties, were very urgent that he should do so; there were business affairs to be wound up and settled, in the conduct of which his presence on the spot was almost essential. Mabel wrote an anxious letter to Miss Lindsay inquiring her opinion of Foster's health, whether he was well enough to undertake such a journey—whether his constitution would be able to withstand the insidious effects of the

climate? Miss Lindsay's reply brought scant comfort: the voyage itself would probably act as a restorative, but, for her own part, she considered Foster to be in a most unfit state to encounter the inevitable roughness of semi-civilized living, not to mention the many dangers of fever, ague, etc.; but he will go, added Miss Lindsay, and I can't stop him.

Jacob Vaughan had only been dead two months.

Mabel in her despair wrote a letter to Frank Foster. It was a very difficult letter to write, because Mabel knew full well her lover's proud and sensitive nature, and many a time did she throw down her pen in despair and tear up the sheet of paper. It was so strange and bewildering to have money at her command and not to be able to use it; to use it for the one precious object of her life—the very salvation of the man she loved.

At first, every draft she commenced twisted itself into an eventual offer of her

hand as the only possible apology for the present offer of pecuniary assistance. All her expressions of concern in his health and well-being led her finally into that dilemma—in his very love and pity for her, he was to forego his dignity and self-respect. At last she wrote a letter which at one moment satisfied her with its coldness, and the next moment dissatisfied her by its want of fervour:—

“DEAR MR. FOSTER,

“I learn from Miss Lindsay that you are about to return to the locality which has so seriously affected your health. I believe I understand your motive for this step;—a very proper desire to resume your professional labours. Miss Lindsay mentions in a letter to me that she does not think you are well enough to return, at least at present. I hope you will make use of me as an old friend to advance you any sum that may be necessary (a loan, understand, which you can repay at your con-

venience) to enable you to take advantage of sea air, or a foreign tour—I am sure the Righi Culm would be a most invigorating place—or perhaps German baths, or wherever the doctors may recommend. No one will ever know that I have written this letter—it is a very small affair between old friends—and it is very hard if old friends may not help one another in this work-a-day world.

“ I am, dear Mr. Foster,

“ Ever very faithfully yours,

“ MABEL VAUGHAN.”

Frank Foster did not show Mabel's letter to Miss Lindsay, but he answered it by the evening's post. The answer cost him many a pang, for Mabel's letter had wounded him sorely—poverty once had kept them asunder, and now wealth stood between them. The rich woman offered him money; very politely, it was true, but politeness could not cancel the insult. Of course this view of the matter was thoroughly wrong-headed, and Miss Lindsay, if she had had

the opportunity, could, with her common sense, have put things straight by showing the difficulties of Mabel's position ; but love is so blind, and irritable and touchy, and sometimes so utterly devoid of faith in the object loved. There was nothing, however, on the surface of Foster's answer which betrayed the state of his feelings : on the contrary, it was written in a very cordial and courteous tone :—

“DEAR MRS. VAUGHAN,

“I am exceedingly obliged to you for your kind offer. I thoroughly appreciate the motive which has prompted it. I assure you in reply, that it is not necessary for me to avail myself of your kindness, because my health is almost restored—indeed I believe I only require the sea voyage to set me up completely—besides this, I am almost pledged by word of mouth, and certainly by professional reputation, to return for a time at least to my old post, where several important

matters are awaiting my personal superintendence.

“I am, dear Mrs. Vaughan,

“Very sincerely yours,

“FRANCIS FOSTER.”

So the affair was settled;—Frank Foster would go back to Tiflis and die—that was Mabel’s reading of the letter.

“Oh, Mary,” she cried in her despair to her sister, who was sitting in the open air, shaded by a thicket of arbutus from the bright sun, on the easy couch that Mr. Vaughan had purchased for her, “help me!” It was a lovely calm summer afternoon, not sultry, but tempered with a gentle breath of sea freshness, and land and sea were steeped in a delicate daffodil light. Mary’s thoughts were thoroughly in unison with the calm influences of the day; and in the gentle dreaminess of half-closed eyes, it seemed as if the rest which belongeth to the people of God had been verily dropped like a holy veil upon her soul: all sin was

cast away, and all care was lost in heavenly blessedness; into the midst of this state of beatitude was suddenly flung the discord of her sister's cry, "Help me!" The spell of blessed peace was rudely broken, and Mary aroused herself with pain to listen to her sister's prayer.

Mabel seated herself at Mary's side and rested her head on her shoulder. She spoke, or rather whispered, with all the abruptness of deep agitation:

"Frank Foster is going back to Tiflis."

"Very imprudent, I should say, considering what you have told me about his state of health," answered Mary quietly, and with some surprise at finding that Foster's movements were the cause of her sister's anxiety. Mabel had told Mary something, but not everything, about Foster's return to England, but as far as feelings went, she had spoken of him in a decided tone of merely friendly interest.

"He says he is pledged to go," continued Mabel.

"I don't consider that any pledge warrants a man in risking his life," observed Mary; "indeed the history of Jephtha's daughter pointedly reveals to us the sinfulness of inconsiderate and intemperate pledges."

"You see he is wholly dependent on his profession," urged Mabel.

"That, indeed, places the affair in a very unfortunate light," responded Mary.

"I have done what I can to stop him," continued Mabel, in a broken voice; "I must tell you in strict confidence, that I offered him, as a loan, mind, any money that he might require to go where the doctors advised—as an old friend, I thought there could be no harm in that."

"No harm, certainly," replied Mary; "a very natural and kind thing to do. Well, and hasn't he accepted the offer?"

"He declines it absolutely," said Mabel, tearfully.

"Well, my dear Mabel," answered Mary, in the same quiet tone, "what else can be

done? You have offered him the loan of money, and he very foolishly, or rather, erroneously, won't accept it. The error, I may almost call it sin, rests on his head.

"But I am sure this journey will be his death," urged Mabel.

"Alas, death is very often the penalty of sin, Mabel dear. I really don't think there is any more to be said on the subject." And Mary took up a book which lay near her. Its title was, "The Christian Soul's Victory; or, This World Conquered."

Mabel watched her sister for a moment in despair, and then, with a convulsive cry, "I love him, Mary!" and clinging to her sister, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

Mary put down her book, and laid her hand affectionately and yet reprovngly on Mabel's head.

And now the natures of the two sisters stood face to face in all their antagonism—the asceticism of a dwarfed physical frame, and the impulses of a perfect physical

development; the first, free and unburdened through physical weakness, the last governed by the strength of conscience. They are not the same human natures, and therefore the same moral medicines and correctives are inapplicable. After the Renaissance had aroused the world from the worship of asceticism, and had turned it once more back to nature, the giant sculptor of the "new birth," who drew his inspiration from the *torso* of Hercules and the majesty of the antique fragments, felt that Christian conscience had for ever destroyed the pagan Venus, and he added the dominating element of conscience to that grand woman of his creation, who awakes to troubled thoughts from her painful sleeping in the chapel of the Medici—Venus no longer, but a perfect woman with a burdened soul. No longer the woman of ideal beauty only, beauty the end of all things, or the beautiful woman degraded by frivolity—those ideals of the pagan world—but woman with all her grandeur of form,

grand as the Venus of Milo, in the chamber of *death*, a watcher at the tomb.

"Mabel, dear, surely you forget yourself. Mr. Vaughan has only been dead about two months."

"I forget nothing, Mary," answered Mabel. "That's why I ask your help. Two months!" she added, in painful voice, "but I loved Frank Foster years ago."

"I thought that girlish love had passed and gone when the rash engagement was broken off."

"So did I, but it hadn't," rejoined Mabel.

"I must say, I look upon it in the light of a sin to talk of loving another man," said Mary; with decision; "at least at the present time."

"It makes me very miserable," pleaded Mabel but what can I do?"

"Conquer it!" answered Mary, with reproachful force. "Pluck out this error."

"Pluck out my heart!" exclaimed Mabel, passionately.

Mary looked up at her sister with wondering eyes.

"I tell you I love him heart and soul!" persisted Mabel.

Her sister's words sounded very wrong and sinful to Mary; but they appeared perhaps even more strange than wrong. In truth, however, love seemed to her a very small factor in the economy of life—a sort of collateral incident in the Christian pilgrimage, not a fundamental condition. And all those love stories with which the world was deluged,—they seemed not merely sinful and unprofitable by reason of their being novels, but at the same time purely foolish through the ridiculous and undue importance bestowed on human love.

"Mabel, dear, I am very pained to hear you talk in this exaggerated tone. The love of the creature makes us subject unto vanity. It is sinful to bestow an excess of love on the creature, which can only be offered without sin to the Author of all blessings and mercies."

"It may be wrong—I don't know whether it is wrong—but I do love him," rejoined Mabel, with a flushed face.

"What would you do?" asked Mary, anxiously. "Enter into an engagement with Mr. Foster so soon after your husband's sudden death? Pray consider the terrible scandal, the manifest error of such a rash course."

"I know how wrong it is," pleaded Mabel. "Oh, Mary, I know how wrong," she repeated piteously, "how ungrateful it is. I declare to you, with the exception of writing that one letter, that I have never sent word or scrap to Frank Foster—never been near him—but if that journey be his death—Oh, Mary, when a few words from me"—and Mabel's voice faltered with emotion.

"Mabel, dear, however painful it may be, we must never palter with right or wrong; it is my duty to tell you as a loving sister that you are doing very wrong even to think of that young man; that you are committing a crime in the sight of Heaven

to allow such a violent and intemperate affection for any human being to dwell in your bosom. You must try to cast out these earthly thoughts; you must strive to think more about heavenly things. It is true that an earthly affection may be, under fitting and sober circumstances, a great blessing and support to some persons in their earthly pilgrimage; but it is not the chief affection which ought to govern man's heart. It can be conquered, believe me; it can be conquered by faithful and earnest prayer. I repeat, pray fervently for grace, and all those evil affections will fly from the heart. Remember, too, darling Mabel, that our adversary, the Devil, always urges us to a wicked and headstrong course by painting every object we sinfully desire, in a bright and alluring light, but directly we have sold ourselves to him, conscience makes those things dull and unprofitable, and even loathsome to our eyes."

Mabel made no rejoinder; she kissed her sister and appeared to acquiesce in the

monitions bestowed upon her. Mary felt thoroughly satisfied with the course she had pursued, and she experienced moreover a considerable sense of inward gratification at her success in dealing with her sister's infirmity. It is somewhat curious why Mabel should have quietly accepted from her sister, conclusions which in earlier days she had fiercely combated with Miss Lindsay; but Mary was her sister, and the habit of the family had ever been to concur in all that Mary advanced, primarily out of consideration for Mary's delicate health—and beyond this, Mabel's own conscience, moved by gratitude towards her late husband, was in a state of antagonism with her love; and still further, there was a terrible doubt whether Foster would ever really forgive her for her marriage. So Mabel strove to school her heart with her sister's monitions—actually strove by prayer to conquer her earthly affection. It was a strange delusion on her part, but it sufficed for the nonce, and at last she absolutely fancied that her

love had been conquered. Mary regarded her sister's spiritual progress with immense gratification, and a very pardonable amount of personal pride—there was now, indeed, every promise of Mabel's entire regeneration.

Alas, for Mary's hopes; the structure which Mabel had succeeded in raising between her heart and Frank Foster, was of the very flimsiest nature—when the strain came, it fell down like a pack of cards.

Mabel was compelled to go up to London for a few days on business connected with executorship matters. This journey, although unavoidable, was a subject of considerable regret to Mary, who knew that Frank Foster still remained with Miss Lindsay: but Mabel very readily promised her sister to avoid all contact with her *former* lover, and she specially used the word "former" in alluding to Foster.

In due course Miss Lindsay called to see Mabel—the change in Mabel's feelings with

regard to Foster, occasioned a certain lack of warmth, or rather constraint, between the two friends.

Miss Lindsay to Mabel's surprise, announced the immediate departure of Foster.

"It is very unnecessary for him to go," observed Mabel, in a tone of annoyance; "strictly between ourselves, I offered him, as a loan, all that would be needful for the perfect restoration of his health by travelling abroad or going where he chose."

"He never said a word to me on the subject," answered Miss Lindsay; "but that's his way, you know."

"At any rate, his going is no fault of mine," urged Mabel.

"He starts to-morrow morning early," said Miss Lindsay, briefly.

"From Southampton, of course?"

"No, Liverpool—a merchant steamer—it's cheaper."

"But not nearly so comfortable," exclaimed Mabel; "no surgeon on board."

"I fancy not," replied Miss Lindsay;

"and of course the accommodation is not so good; but we must cut our coats according to our cloth."

Mabel made no reply, and after some further conversation relating to indifferent matters, Miss Lindsay returned home.

The structure in which Mary had so much confidence immediately broke down.

"If he must go, he must go," murmured Mabel, "but he shall go by a proper ship—he must and *shall* do that."

Frank Foster was busy packing his writing-case in Miss Lindsay's parlour when his hostess returned.

"You musn't run away any more, dear lady," he said, looking up brightly. "You must give me all your company till I go away; I want to keep on telling you how kind and good you have been to me."

"Then I shan't stay," said Miss Lindsay.

"But it does me real good to tell you," continued Foster; "and besides, I want to tell you something else. You must know that Mrs. Vaughan very kindly, and in a

most delicate manner, offered me the pecuniary means of going abroad and getting quite well. Though I refused the offer, I thoroughly appreciated the kindness; when you see her again, tell her what I say."

Foster, as he spoke, had his back to the French windows, and Mabel, as she entered the room from the garden, heard the words he had spoken about her.

"Thank you, Mr. Foster," she stammered. He turned suddenly at her voice, and staggered back in surprise, catching at a chair for support.

"I know you are going to return to Tiflis," she said, speaking with nervous, rapid utterance; "I know it is necessary for you to go back, but I was determined not to give you the chance of writing to decline another offer from an old friend. I want you to return by one of the P. and O. boats as far as Malta or Constantinople, or at least as far as they go, not by one of those uncomfortable merchant steamers."

"It is very kind of you," he answered—

his voice trembled as he spoke—"but the truth is, my berth is already secured."

"Never mind that," she replied quickly. "Do gratify me by accepting this small request. Miss Lindsay," she cried, "do try to make this obstinate man——" She turned her head to invoke Miss Lindsay's assistance, but that lady had left the room. In terror at being left alone with her lover she lost her presence of mind—the room seemed to whirl before her eyes—she could only stammer some incoherent words.

But Foster, with perfect courtesy, relieved her from her painful embarrassment. "As you so kindly wish it," he said, "I shall be happy to be indebted to you for my passage by the P. and O. My things were going to be sent off this evening by the luggage-train, so there will be no difficulty in changing the route."

"Thank you," she said; but her eyes caught sight of the painful thinness of his hand, and raising her eyes for a moment's glance at his face, she saw the red scar on

his temple which still remained from that day of her agony, which she remembered so vividly.

"I don't think the doctors ought to let you go," she murmured. "I am sure you are not strong enough to rough it."

"I must go," he said decisively; "the voyage will be sure to set me up. Good-bye, Mrs. Vaughan," and he grasped her hand with his—she *felt* the thinness of his hand.

"Again, good-bye," she murmured; "it is very good of you to accept my small offer. I must go and find Miss Lindsay——" anything for an excuse, for she was fast breaking down.

Oh, good God! should she never see him again? He was going back in his weakness to peril and death; and she, with all her money, was powerless to save his life!

"Oh, Frank!" she cried, turning involuntarily on the threshold of the window entrance, "don't go back to that fearful climate."

Notwithstanding his physical weakness, he fought this battle of the heart better than she did; perhaps he was somewhat incensed against her, and pique gave him the force she lacked.

"I think, Mrs. Vaughan, we had better avoid all this. It is very painful to you—to us both, and it is quite needless; you have performed a very friendly act, and I have gratefully accepted it." He spoke with great firmness, and perhaps his voice sounded somewhat harshly in her ears. She had all along feared his estrangement from her, and that fear drove her to desperation.

"Oh, Frank!" she cried passionately, "have some mercy on me; think of my position—a widow of little more than two months. Oh, that accursed marriage! why do I talk of it to you? Oh, that wicked act of faithlessness! for we were pledged, not by words, but by more than words—God's will; and yet if you knew—if you only knew all—no, a little, even a very little. I

told your poor mother I married that man for money. It was a lie!—a lie to degrade myself in your eyes—to cure you of thinking any more of the woman you had lost. Oh, Frank, I love you so much!—alas, I never knew how much I loved you till that accursed marriage day—don't turn from me."

He had turned from her, because the mention of that day brought back the thought of his agony among the rocks, and he turned too in amazement at the fierce emotion depicted in her face and form.

"Have a little pity," she pleaded, in gasping words; "we women do suffer—they fling self-sacrifice upon us till it crushes the soul—I say, I suffered agonies piled up. My love for you—can you guess what it made me do? It made me almost a murderess. His life or mine, my love for you—suicide, I say—my hand on the door of that express train—death, or faithfulness to you—faithfulness, I solemnly swear, or I should have been crushed to death by those

swift wheels. My love for you—I never knew what a fearful thing it was, till I married that man.”

Well-nigh in exhaustion she sank down on her knees at his feet, but she still urged her vehement prayer for his love—she dared not pause for any word of his; in her terrible anxiety she felt her *amende* must be urged to the bitter end, for it needed but a word from him, a gesture even, to crush the one hope of her life.

“I fought it off, this love of mine, all the time of my married life—ever since his death—I should never have spoken now; but the thought of your peril has torn the words from my heart. I don’t care who rails at me, I only care for your life—let them rail——”

She saw how deeply he was moved, and she saw that his strength was little capable of supporting the emotion which wrung his heart.

“Selfish wretch that I am,” she cried reproachfully; “my words are too vehement,

I'll say nothing more—yes," she added quickly, "one thing more—for Heaven's sake don't let any wretched feeling stand between us now, any petty thought of my wealth—don't let that be a curse upon us—sacrifice any false pride for the love of me—for the sake of all the agony I have suffered in my love for you."

After a moment of terrible suspense, she felt that the victory was hers; the hand she clasped had given her the heart she sought, ere his emotion could frame responsive words.

"Mabel, dear Mabel," he murmured; in the vehement conflict of his feelings he could say no more—he was utterly bewildered, moreover, by his dawning comprehension of the woman's nature who knelt at his feet—utterly dazed by that great wealth of love and devotion which she was offering to him with such humility; but those words of his were enough for her.

"Thank God!" she cried, with fervent thankfulness; and then she added in anxious

voice, "Not a word more, dearest ; I know all you feel—you are very weak still—mine now," and she clasped him in her arms—she was so strong, and the feverish ague still clung about him—she drew his head to her bosom, and she kissed his forehead. "Let us be silent and say nothing for a little time. Let us try to be calm—this joy is almost too fearful. Oh, Frank, thank God, the terrible barriers are flung down now." They sat awhile in silence—the silence of beating hearts. "Oh God," she presently cried, in the fulness of her heart, "you have rewarded us at last ; the world, and all its perplexities, and doubts, and sin, stood between us and our hearts, and now, oh merciful God, you have made us one, and cast away from us all perplexity, and doubt, and sin, for evermore."

Miss Lindsay did come back. "I give you two notice," she said, "once for all, that I am a dreadful dragon of propriety."

"You darling !" cried Mabel, and she started from the lover she had regained,

threw herself into the arms of the woman whose friendship had been, indeed, a great and precious friendship. "You have given him to me, safe and sound, through all the peril of a terrible illness: how can I ever bless you enough?"

"God's mercy," exclaimed Miss Lindsay.

"But your work," answered Mabel, with a fervent kiss; "your doing, that I am now what I am—your help through the hours of darkness and despair; I can never pay that great debt. Give us your blessing, true friend, it will do us good."

"I do bless you very heartily," said Miss Lindsay, with fervour, "and I pray God to have you in His merciful keeping." Miss Lindsay turned away from Mabel, and left the room—her heart also was very full. "Oh, Lord!" she cried, "those two souls that you gave into my charge, they are safe now from all temptation in the holy might of true and honourable love." And the prayer she uttered was a prayer of great rejoicing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ENEMY BIDES HIS TIME.

MABEL had her own way in everything; Foster could refuse her nothing. She had loved so truly, and suffered and endured so much for his sake, that he felt she had a supreme right to regulate all matters relating to their engagement; although, indeed, the limitations which she cast upon it did seem at first sight somewhat hard. She peremptorily insisted that the fact of their engagement should not be made public for at least nine months from the date of the death of Mr. Vaughan; they were not to be married until the expiration of one year, and Mabel's first stipulation on this point

had been still more stringent. Additional hardness was given to these conditions, by Mabel's insistence that they were not to meet until the nine months had elapsed, and she was very reluctant even with regard to correspondence during this period.

"I do not wish to give any opportunity for people to tax me with an engagement which I shall be unable to deny, if I am forced to speak upon the subject." Mabel eventually yielded so far that a restricted correspondence might be carried on under cover to Miss Lindsay; nothing in truth was to bring them together except the serious illness of either.

"You are much better now, dearest," she said! "and you will go abroad to those German baths, and, I trust, soon get well and strong. I know the thought of making use of my money—that money which will be one day your own—rankles a little in your mind, but I am sure you will endure any little feeling of *mauvaise honte* for my sake. I shall be so happy when I think of you in

Germany. Only six more months, Frank, and then we shall be free to meet and talk as much as we choose—and then three more months!—you musn't go to Switzerland, remember, till we are married. Switzerland is the old dream! Oh, Frank, darling Frank! can God really mean us to be as happy as that—you and I, and all those glorious mountains—you and I together, and those glorious works of God? It will be just the time of year for a Swiss tour; it would be no use your going to Switzerland now—would it, poor weak darling?—till you are strong and well enough to enjoy those magnificent walks. But you will be your old self, I think, when you have been to Germany; and Miss Lindsay says she shall be able to go with you, at least for a time, as she wants to see some of those Moravian establishments, so everything suits admirably."

It would have been ungrateful to say so in words, but Frank Foster could not quite help showing that there was a certain

travelling companion he would have preferred even to Miss Lindsay.

“Of course, dearest, I wish I could go with you—and yet, at the same time, I don’t—I can’t expect you to understand exactly what I feel. Oh, Frank, the very intensity of my joy at being engaged to you, the feeling that I am really loved and understood by you, it is almost like a pain to my heart. The feeling comes like the anguish of food to a famished body. Yes, darling, I have suffered so much, my heart has been so tortured and torn, that I can scarcely endure such an excess of joy. I shall be all the better for being quietly at Torquay with my own people. I shall get back to my old self once more. I have travelled very far away from my own nature; I have been wicked and rebellious, like the children of Israel, and I have said and thought hard and bitter things! I have almost in my despair turned away from Heaven. When we meet again I shall be, by His blessing, the Mabel of old days, and

the cruel wounds which have scarcely ceased bleeding will be quite healed—and love will then be only joy and happiness.”

“Besides all this thought of myself,” she added after a pause, “we ought at least in gratitude, as God has given us all this happiness, to think of what is right and proper in His sight and in the sight of men. You must remember that I am still the Puritan girl you used to love and sometimes tease for her narrow old-fashioned notions; but somehow those old religious feelings of my childhood have come back in this blessed hour stronger than ever to my heart. You must remember,” she continued, “that I have a mass of duties to perform before I shall be quite free from the obligations of my former state. I dare say Miss Lindsay may have told you something about my views of justice and honour with regard to the large property bequeathed to me. Oh, Frank, Mr. Vaughan honoured me greatly by bequeathing to me this great trust, and I must always feel deeply grate-

ful to him for this testimony of his confidence in my integrity. I love you so much that when I stand by your side at the altar, I will not have on my conscience one thought of a duty or obligation left unfulfilled, to destroy the happiness of that joyful day."

He listened to all she said with a beating heart: she was his at last; and he was the idol of her noble nature. He was almost overcome by shame when he thought of all her nobleness, and yet no harsh, pedantic affectation of duty or religion marred her sweetness; all was so womanly and loving, so enthralling in the soft graces of womanhood, and yet withal so grand and noble.

"I don't deserve this great love, Mabel." He spoke with quivering lip. "I have been very peevish and distrustful; I hope illness is my excuse. I have never looked at things as I ought to have looked at them; I have kept dwelling upon myself and my own narrow thoughts of happiness; forgetful that there were great duties for

you to fulfil, and which must for awhile part us asunder. You are braver, and truer, and nobler than I am, Mabel."

"Don't talk nonsense, sir," she exclaimed, with a bright smile breaking through her tears; and then with sudden emphasis, "Not truer, Frank. I'm not truer than you are: that awful day you passed among the rocks! Miss Lindsay told me all about it. I too suffered on that day," she cried, with a shudder which convulsed her whole frame: "Oh, my God! spare me from agony like that." She sank down at his side overcome by her emotion.

He would have kissed her, but she drew back from him.

"Not now, dearest," she murmured; "not till I have got quite rid of those horrible thoughts. You see," she added after a lengthened pause, "that it's all for the best we should be separated for a while. I said the wounds are not healed yet, and I should only torture you as well as myself. I know I shall soon recover my

old nature: 'He loves me,' I shall say; I shall mix up that joyful thought with everything. Oh, darling," she exclaimed fervently, "when I utter those words, it works like magic, why, even now—oh, you cannot tell what blessed work those words are doing! they are crowding out the old hard revengeful feelings from my heart. I meant to be rigidly just towards his family—every jot and tittle of their just rights; but I meant to do it out of scorn and hatred; I meant to fling the money at Mrs. Corley with bitter words, but I shan't do that now—I can't do that now; I'm too happy, I'm too grateful for all God's mercy to hate any more; I haven't got room for hatred in my heart. Kiss me, Frank; you can kiss me now."

"Farewell, darling," she said with fervour. "May God protect you for my sake; may you soon get well and strong. Enjoy yourself in Germany, mind—a regular holiday. I need not tell you to take care of him, Miss Lindsay; you are always doing that,

you dear good soul. For only six months, Frank," she added in a low tone, and she kissed his forehead.

"Oh, Mabel, dearest," he murmured, "my lips," and he held her hands in his. She looked at him, gazing into his eyes with a strange intermingling of happiness and sadness, and her eyes presently filled with tears.

"No, no," she answered gently, "in six months, dearest—a little patience—when I am once more the old Mabel. I can only thank God, Frank, that I have been permitted at this time to give you even that kiss. Farewell, darling," and with a sudden effort she left him and left the house.

She lingered a short time in the garden.

"Oh God," she cried, in the fulness of her heart, "don't make me too happy; this joy is terrible. It would kill me if I lost him now; if it be your good purpose, let us both die, but not separation here on earth."

Going up to her room, she passed the

door of *their* room, and suddenly the fierce words of his relentless doom burst forth in great red letters in her memory.. Well, that cruel decree was already set aside—without let or hindrance, she would, by God's mercy, marry in due time the man she loved—but she could not bear to assert her triumph over the dead man's will; nay, she still quailed before the old curse, and she shuddered now as she had shuddered when it was first pronounced. She passed on to the room in which she had always slept, which had been the dressing-room of their bedroom. A feeling of reproach clouded her mind—he had left her the wealth which was to be the foundation of her new happiness, and yet in the short space of three months she was actually engaged to be married, in defiance of his emphatic objections. “I'm glad I'm not to see Frank for six whole months,” she murmured, and that recollection was a sort of salve to her conscience. But her feelings did not realize her hopes: she had

thought that she could be very happy alone in her own room : she had believed and hoped that with that feeling of love in her heart, the old prayers and the old spiritual communings with God would return to her with all their old happiness and consolation ; she wanted to tell the whole story of her love to God, and, as it were, to receive in return the calming approval of Heaven. She would be better able to endure her happiness through that support. But, alas, to her dismay, when she sought to pray she could not find words ; she tried in vain some set words of thanksgiving, but they sounded very hollow in the lips. In weariness and sorrow, she threw off her dress and sat before the glass ; and the glass showed that her face was worn with perplexity and sorrow, and her eyes red with tears, and although her past life of anxiety had told somewhat on the fulness of her perfect figure, yet the general physique remained uninjured in all its thorough development. Her hair released from the

comb fell in full, long tresses to her waist.

“What have I done wrong?” she murmured in sad protest; “this engagement was forced upon me. Frank would have lost his life if he had returned to Tiflis; we are not to be married for one whole year. I have thought of others as well as myself; they are to have their just share in that property of his—and as for me, am I to be doomed to perpetual widowhood when God has made me love so deeply—because that mad jealousy must live beyond the grave?” But notwithstanding the justice of her protest, the recollection of her late husband’s animosity and rancour against her re-marriage grew intensely vivid, and the old words of cruelty crushed into her soul with all the force of actual utterance. “No,” she cried vehemently, “I tell you no, Jacob. Death stands between us now; I am free before God and man. I am his promised wife; I belong to him: his, as long as I live; his, through all eternity.”

Nevertheless, the words of Jacob could not be effaced from her soul: she could not sleep, and in the darkness of the night, in that borderland betwixt wakefulness and sleep, when the trammels of reason which bind the thoughts are loosed, and the thoughts wander into the channels of the impossible rendered terribly possible by the absence of mental control, she saw once more the smile of the dead man's face, against which all words of justice, or argument, or reproach had been urged in vain.

She mercifully fell asleep with the dawning light, and when she awoke the sun was shining brightly. She flung open the window of her room and gazed into the garden. Everything looked so fresh and pleasant and hopeful in the morning light; the morbid terrors of the night were forgotten in the sense of healthy life.

"I have work to do to-day which will make me think of others and forget myself," she exclaimed thankfully—"I am

going to make those people love and honour me. Oh, Jacob, I know you have made all this possible through that will. I'm not ungrateful, indeed I'm not; I must always love and honour you for that."

The heart of Mrs. Corley was carried at the bayonet-point of generosity; that hard, mean, petty conglomerate, which performed the functions of a heart in Mrs. Corley's nature, was struck by the potent rod which Mabel wielded, and there welled out therefrom a copious stream of watery gratitude and unfeigned astonishment. How Mabel got possession of that rod was, indeed, for the time a standing miracle to Mrs. Corley. She had herself succeeded in constructing a thoroughly religious life upon the basis of covetousness and meanness—envy, hatred, and malice—a radical change of foundation would have been difficult; but a superstructure of faith and sound evangelical principles had been raised at a comparatively small cost, and although there may

have been some difficulty in dovetailing the two portions of Mrs. Corley's structure, still it looked well enough from the outside to ordinary eyes.

The fear of the Lord was the watchword of Mrs. Corley's household. The various members were coerced by this fear, from Mr. Corley himself down to the Irish char-woman who had been mercifully plucked from the errors of Rome, which she didn't understand, and had been converted to Protestant truth of which she was equally ignorant, because she had a large family dependent upon her exertions, and her lot had been cast in a strong Protestant neighbourhood: she retained, however, under both forms of her theological ignorance, the same doubts as to the moral rights of dripping, candle-ends, and small coal.

So Mrs. Corley governed her household through the fear of the Lord, and she carried her system of petty worrying meanness into all the branches of her household management. She was herself subject to

one fear—the fear of her servants; and in the fear of their abrupt departure her despotism was tempered at a certain point of tyranny; but as her husband and children did not possess the option of leaving the house, they were helplessly subject to the full power of an iron theocracy. Mr. Corley's lot was, however, mercifully mitigated through the temporary relief afforded by business hours in the City.

It must be mentioned that, in an age of scepticism, Mrs. Corley had never entertained any theological doubts; the subject of miracles had never caused her any inward questionings; her faith was unimpeachable with regard to divine interposition in the ordinary operations of nature; but when Mabel, the woman she had hated and spited, and had endeavoured to injure in a hundred mean ways, stood before her, and declared that she voluntarily relinquished the third part of her wealth to Mrs. Corley, as sister of the late Mr. Vaughan, and moreover, when Mabel asked Mrs. Corley to

love her and accept her love and goodwill in return, then Mrs. Corley, with all the smallness of her mind and pettiness of her disposition, was utterly bewildered.

The sudden appearance of an angel in her dining-room would have been far more comprehensible, but that human nature could be thus great and noble and generous and self-denying, passed the bounds of her belief; nevertheless, there stood Mabel in flesh and blood, and thirty-three thousand odd tangible pounds were waiting the pleasure of Mrs. Corley.

"But why, why, Mabel?" gasped Mrs. Corley, deeply affected.

"I consider it my duty," answered Mabel simply. "I wrote to you from the first, that you might rely upon my doing my duty with regard to the property so generously confided to my keeping; until matters were fully ascertained by Mr. Barton, I was unable to name the amount; one third for you, and one third for the widow and children of Isaac Vaughan."

The emotion was too much for Mrs. Corley : " My salts, Corley."

" Yes, my dear," answered Mr. Corley, who was himself greatly moved ! " a little brandy, my love ? " he suggested tenderly.

" Just a thimble-ful," murmured Mrs. Corley ; " it will give me heart."

That sip of brandy did give Mrs. Corley heart, as far as alcohol could serve as a substitute for the milk of human kindness.

" Go down on your knees, Corley, and bless her," cried Mrs. Corley, with fervour, " and thank Heaven for having put this thought into her generous soul."

Mr. Corley was preparing to obey. " For mercy sake," pleaded Mabel, " if you don't want me to run away."

" Well, at least I'll speak the truth," exclaimed Mrs. Corley emphatically. " I don't deny, Mabel, that I was angry when you stood between my blessed children and that property of his ; I don't deny that I have said wrong and bitter things. Yes, yes

—it does me good to make a clean breast of it—I don't deny that I did suspect you of loving that young man."

Mabel's face blushed crimson.

"My love!" interposed Mr. Corley diplomatically.

"I will speak out," persisted Mrs. Corley. "Maria Corley never palters with the truth. I did say, shame upon me, that you had gone to see him on that fatal day; but your conduct since poor Jacob's departure, convinces me that I misunderstood your feelings and actions. I know that you have never met that gentleman from the day of Jacob's death, up to the present time—and I'm sure that's proof enough that you didn't love him then, and that you don't love him now."

Mabel could not trust herself to make any answer, but she felt very embarrassed. "Come now," continued Mrs. Corley, "I've had my say, and I've said I'm very sorry, but words won't bring poor Jacob back," and Mrs. Corley wept.

"My love," expostulated Mr. Corley meekly.

"I oughtn't to wish him back—I know that. It's wicked to say so," and Mrs. Corley wiped her eyes. "Resignation is the duty of all real Christians."

"Amen," said Mr. Corley solemnly. "Do I understand that I am to call on Mr. Barton?" he inquired eagerly of Mabel.

"If you please; the business arrangements for the transfer are in his hands; he will tell you all the details. Of course the money is to be settled on Mrs. Corley and the children."

"Of course," chimed in Mrs. Corley. "Oh, Mabel, dear, we shall remember you night and morning in our prayers—shan't we, Corley, love?"

"Certainly, my dear; morning and night," echoed Mr. Corley, but his fervour was somewhat chilled by the thought of an entire settlement of the money on his wife.

"Not alone shall we bless you in our own prayers," continued Mrs. Corley, with en-

thusiasm ; "but we shall bless you at the altar of the household. Fetch me the book of family prayers, Corley, and a pen."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Mabel in some dismay.

"Mem.," answered Mrs. Corley, writing in the fly-leaf of the book, "to pray night and morning for our benefactress and dear sister-in-law, Mabel Vaughan." Mrs. Corley blotted and closed the book. "And more than this," she added, addressing her husband, "when you pray for Mabel, you shall pray that we may be permitted one day to do something that may testify to our gratitude."

"Certainly, my love, by all means," responded Mr. Corley.

"Your love and good feeling are all I want," exclaimed Mabel.

"If the day comes on which we can do more, it shall be done," said Mrs. Corley with emphasis—"eh, Corley?"

"Decidedly, my love, it shall be done," answered Mr. Corley with warmth.

"One kiss, Mabel," pleaded Mrs. Corley, "one kiss of forgiveness."

"No, no," responded Mabel with fervour—"a kiss of good-will, and love, and trust and confidence for evermore," and Mabel threw her arms round Mrs. Corley's neck and kissed her. Mrs. Corley's kiss in return was as warm and heartfelt a kiss as Mrs. Corley was capable of giving. It was well enough, and it conveyed its satisfaction to Mabel; but it was not the great true kiss that Miss Lindsay could give when she chose to give a kiss—not that grand kiss welling up from the depths of a noble nature, and a heart of steadfast love.

Mabel's next visit was to the widow and children of Isaac Vaughan. Isaac had been an essentially unprosperous man during his lifetime, and a lack of prosperity was in itself a crime in his brother's eyes; he had moreover married in direct opposition to Jacob's wishes, a lady who was by faith a Roman Catholic. After this marriage, Jacob had persistently refused him all

assistance in his ineffectual struggles with misfortune, and the lot of his widow and numerous children would have been perforce a very hard one, for Jacob was relentless in his animosities, if Mabel had not secretly afforded them all the assistance in her power during her husband's lifetime.

The widow and her children gathered round Mabel when she entered their house, and the young children clung to her with cries of joy, for her presence had ever been a harbinger of good; but when Mabel declared the purpose of her visit in all its importance, the cries of joy were stilled by an amazement which restrained even the youngest child. They shed tears all round, Mabel as well as the rest, for they felt that common words were not good enough for such a great occasion, and they all clung to Mabel in a state of dumb gratitude and adoration.

So Mabel's great task was done, and she returned home rejoicing greatly. She had arranged to return to Torquay that after-

noon by the express train. She hurried upstairs, and once more to *their* room. She opened the door and locked herself in. Jacob Vaughan had inhabited that room so long, that it seemed to Mabel as if in some strange manner he must be nearer to that room than to any other place on earth, and in any event that room was the one spot of all others which was most vividly associated in her mind with his life.

Her thoughts ran half in low speech and half in self-communion.

"I am very happy, Jacob, and I owe all this happiness to you, because you have given me the power of doing this work of justice and right, and you have enabled me to clear my character in the eyes of all these people, and gain their love and goodwill. If it is permitted you to know what I have done, I know you will feel as happy as I do, because I am certain that those petty feelings of animosity which stand forth in such strong relief in this mortal life must fade away into nothingness in that

awful world of souls. What you would wish to do now I have done, and I believe that as God's mercy places all this joy in my heart, so God's mercy, in His Almighty power, will bear to you the knowledge that I have performed this act of common justice by your own flesh and blood ; and I believe, because I feel so much joy in my heart, that the hard words are all revoked, and that the curse which you uttered in this world of time has never found an entrance into the world of eternity. Oh, Jacob, I think you must love me now!" she cried, bursting into tears.

Mabel returned to Torquay. Mary Smith marvelled at the brightness of her sister's face as she entered the house.

"Oh, Mary," she cried in gleeful exultation, "all his relatives love me at last ; kiss me, kiss me, I am so happy."

And Mary kissed Mabel in her quiet, calm manner of inward restraint and secret protest.

Deep into the night did Mabel sit up in

her room writting a letter to Frank Foster.

“DEAREST FRANK,

“Be as surprised as you like! Why, lo and behold, your pious, stiff Puritan wife (always your wife in God’s sight, darling), has broken through her stern injunctions, and, instead of waiting for a whole month, has, in less than forty-eight hours written a letter to you. I can’t help it; I must have you know how happy I am. God seems, in His boundless love and mercy, to cast His sanctification on my heart; to make my love for you still greater and holier; and it seems to me, in some strange way, as if this love of mine was His chosen way of raising me to a nobler life. I feel it has cast out of my heart a great deal of the old leaven of malice and uncharitableness. Don’t smile at what I write. I was always taught to see God’s hand in all things. You can’t tell how new and strange it is for me to breathe an atmo-

sphere of love, after living a life of hard feeling and bitterness with all around—and now they all love me; this is God's bright sunshine which our holy love has shed upon my heart. Let Miss Lindsay read this letter, Frank; she has so often seen me sad, that I should like her to know my joy—downhearted, distrustful, faithless, and now so full of faith, and trust, and hope."

In obedience to its injunctions, after Foster had read Mabel's letter, he read it aloud to Miss Lindsay.

"Amen!" she ejaculated when the reading was finished. "Be very thankful; the Lord has given you a wife with a great and noble heart. Some women are sent into this world—or perhaps the Devil, I'm not quite sure, afterwards turns them to his cursed purpose—to drag down and degrade men; but you may reverence, and, I say, worship this wife of yours; her heart is a rare piece of God's true handiwork; it only lacks the last touches of His saving grace

to make it perfect, always excepting that inherent taint of original sin which grace hides. Cling to her, and she must lead you right. You men want a lot of leading, I can tell you; original sin being especially strong in men. And I tell you to rejoice greatly in that this love of yours is bestowed upon a woman who, through the power of love, will be able to teach you more real good than all books, and priests, and preachers in the world."

"Amen!" responded Foster in his turn. He could not trust himself to speak, but he carried off the letter to the silence of his own room. It may be that the cold shade of modern doubt had passed over his belief; that she was right in saying that her feelings were not his; but the great argument of her love dispelled many doubts from his mind, and he felt that faith, at least, and constancy and love were *real* things, and not mere vibrations of nerve fibre.

"Well," cried Miss Lindsay, looking across the table with triumphant exulta-

tion, "what next, I wonder? This vile wretched game of yours is finished, I suppose—worked out, hey? Not Mabel's soul for your crown, you scoundrel; the holiness of true love protects her. You can't touch her now, I say; the Lord may try her in His mercy with many troubles and many sorrows, but your temptations are all in vain; only one point of attack was ever open to your spite, the steadfastness of her love, but that vulnerable part in her armour of nobleness is invulnerable now. Come, I'm all ready for a new campaign," she added defiantly. "Don't fancy I'm sitting quietly here because I'm tired, or daunted, or afraid of your devilish tricks: I'm only waiting for the Lord's orders. I'm all ready to go here or there, or wherever the Lord wills, at half an hour's notice. Recollect, the old armour is burnished up, and the true and tried sword is sharpened like a razor, and the 'Brazen Vessel' creates hundreds of new prayers every week, and my second cousin, once re-

moved, at Glasgow, the Reverend Donald MacTonans—you know him well enough, I'll be bound, though he and I have only just renewed the old family connection—well, he's a tower of strength, a big voice, and plenty of downright stamina for hard praying, and he's got all Glasgow at his back—good, strong, stout prayers, mind—none of your amateur lisplings on soft cushions, but hard words, 'straight out from the shoulder, and no mistake,' as my brother Bob used to say—I can hear him now, bless him!—of the old school fights years ago. Ah! those happy days when he and I were children together in that bright glorious Edinburgh, and he went to the High School, and I went to that dear good old dame's. Ah me!" and Miss Lindsay's thoughts wandered back to the days long passed: "Ah, Bob!" she cried, "dear Bob!" and the tears came into her eyes, "you shall never be ashamed as you stand in God's sight of your 'little Madge.'—'Forward, forward!' it's the old motto of

our crest, and that scoundrel shall never see my back ! By the Lord's blessing, I'll fight my battle against the Devil and all his lies, as you fought your fight bravely, to death and victory."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENEMY SHOWS HIS HAND.

IN the fulness of heart and the fervour of her gratitude for the great gift of Frank Foster's love, Mabel did many acts which she fondly hoped would be accepted by Heaven as tokens of her humble but devout gratitude. They were perhaps not very wise acts, but for their wisdom she was not responsible. In the enthusiasm of her heart, she followed where others led, and Mr. Simeon was an accredited minister of the gospel, and her sister Mary was learned in all the ways of grace. Mr. Simeon's chapel of ease duly received its three coats of sound white flatted paint

per contract with a thoroughly low church decorator and house painter, plumber, etc., a pew-holder, formerly reprobate, but now in a state of grace, although trading on borrowed capital. Certain chromatic stencillings were proposed in accordance with present fashion.

"Are they Scriptural?" inquired Mary, in her plain simple manner, but earnestly and to the point. On failure of the required proof by the decorator, these stencillings were peremptorily forbidden.

Fifty pounds' worth of small cotton drawers were duly despatched to certain reliable agents in Morocco for the partial clothing of the little Barbary Jews. Mary held that this gift was of a truly Scriptural character, and fully capable of Scriptural proof—the material was purchased of a draper, also a pew-holder, at a reduction on the retail price. The quality was perhaps not quite first-rate, but on the whole, it was as good as the conscience of the draper, having regard to his own legitimate

profits, permitted him to supply, and a quasi-religious character was conferred on the garments themselves through their being cut out and made up at Dorcas Meetings, strictly composed of thoroughly evangelical persons, whose fingers were animated by a deep sense of the blessed nature of their needle-work.

Finally, at the joint and earnest instance of Mr. Simeon and Mary, Mabel gave a very large cheque for the purpose of converting Irish Roman Catholics to Christianity. The Scriptural character of this donation was proved most satisfactorily to Mabel, as also its special accordance with the will of Heaven. In addition to all these distinctly religious acts, Mabel was never weary in conferring large and small gifts tending to the comfort and material well-being of her parents and sister. It must be particularly noted that Mary received all these gifts in a thoroughly religious spirit; the justness of her earlier views with regard to the reception of mundane benefits had been strength-

ened in the course of her spiritual progress. She now regarded Mabel as a mere instrument or medium in the Divine economy for the distribution of these blessings, and she accordingly thanked her with calm, quiet thanks, but she did not fail to pour fourth the fervour of her gratitude at the Throne of grace. Mr. Smith, on the other hand, had not so entirely cast off the taint of the old Adam, and although the awe of Mary kept him in restraint, still, in secret, when he and Mabel were alone, although he felt he was doing wrong, nevertheless he could not help giving way to his natural infirmity, and though he said but little (he never had said very much throughout the course of his earthly career), he could not help blessing Mabel for her goodness to them all, and thanking Heaven for having bestowed such a loving daughter upon him.

There was great comfort to Mabel in this warm affection, and although she felt that her father was wholly ignorant of the terrible nature of the sacrifice she had

endured, still, love is love, and bears a blessing even in its ignorance.

Mary felt very justly elated at the very satisfactory spiritual advancement made by her sister.

"You have much to be devoutly thankful for, darling Mabel," she observed one day as they were sitting together.

"I am very thankful," rejoined Mabel warmly, "very thankful."

"At one time, I frankly confess," continued Mary, "that I trembled lest that great access of wealth should choke up your soul; but hitherto, and I say it joyfully, it has not had that lamentable effect. Perhaps, as I said before, you may have been unduly lavish in the distribution of that large sum of money, and although I quite feel that Mrs. Corley may have had some claim upon your bounty, still I cannot say that I quite approve of your bestowing so much upon the children of a Roman Catholic mother."

"They are the children of Mr. Vaughan's own brother," pleaded Mabel.

"But still, darling," urged Mary, "it seems to me, speaking with all humility, that we ought not to overlook religious error. I believe Mrs. Corley is sound in faith, and has always brought up her family in the way of true Protestant religion; but, alas! Mrs. Isaac Vaughan is avowedly a partaker in the sin of the mother of abominations and lies."

"She has always tried to do her best for her family on very small means," rejoined Mabel.

"That is merely a moral duty, and a carnal act," answered Mary with some slight, very slight, tone of asperity. "The very animals round us take care of their young. I do not wish to argue this very palpable question; I am willing to believe you have acted for the best—enough of this. But what I do desire most particularly to insist upon," and Mary's voice grew very earnest, "is the large, nay abundant measure of Christian privileges which are mercifully vouchsafed to you.

Mr. Simeon is indeed a truly Christian pastor, and full of godly edification. It seems to me that you have nothing to do in this world but grow in grace from year to year, to ripen, as it were, as the fruits ripen beneath the blessed warmth of heaven. You are rich enough, if your money be judiciously invested in sound securities, avoiding all foreign bonds—a source, I learn, of great mental anxiety to many sincere Christians—to be free from all carking worldly cares; you have literally no duty to do which ought to interfere with the care of your own soul. It is of course your bounden duty to think sometimes about others and do good to others, but your first thought and your first care must always be for your own spiritual progress.

“You have, I am glad to believe, been able to conquer that ill-advised and intemperate error of your girlhood, the love for that young man.” Mabel trembled violently and blushed crimson at her sister's words, but Mary was so deeply engaged in

framing her own sentences that she did not perceive her sister's emotion. "I would not for worlds," continued Mary, "speak uncharitably of any one; but I do confess that I always entertained certain misgivings as to the soundness of Mr. Foster's views on spiritual matters: fortunately, however, any errors of that kind on his part, do not now concern you or your eternal welfare." Mabel could not speak; she wished indeed that her secret should still be a secret, even from her sister; but in addition to this, it was absolutely crushing to her soul to hear such words spoken of that love which she felt was God's greatest gift of mercy. "Yes, Mabel, dear," said Mary after a short pause, "let me beseech you, from henceforth, to give up all idea of another marriage, which must inevitably distract your thoughts from serious objects, and lead you astray from the one great object of your earthly pilgrimage, the perfecting of your soul for the heavenly kingdom. Let me ask you soberly, ought

a love for some poor erring human creature to weigh against the eternal interests of your own soul? is human love worth that cost?" It was the old question, born of asceticism, which has been asked and answered through all the Christian ages of the world.

Mabel had her answer—the answer of healthy human nature, also God's work—and the words of rejoinder burnt on her lips; but Mary was so weak, so evidently incapable of enduring the hard words of argument, that Mabel held her peace.

"Kiss me, darling," murmured Mary, fatigued by the effort she had made; and Mabel kissed her sister. "Remember, you have nothing more to do, dearest," said Mary, languidly; "you have only to let your soul ripen quietly into perfect grace. I'll try to sleep a little now," she added; and she turned her face from the light and closed her eyes.

Shortly after Mabel's return to Torquay, Mrs. Corley wrote a letter to her, announc-

ing the engagement of her eldest daughter to a gentleman who promised to prove in every respect a most eligible husband ; a gentleman of sufficiently matured age, of thoroughly domesticated habits, methodic and exact in all the pursuits of life ; and, above all, gifted with eminently sound religious principles tending towards Calvinistic strictness ; in a word, a husband calculated in every way to assure the solid happiness of a young but sensible girl.

“I don't hesitate to confess to you, dear Mabel,” the letter continued, “that our beloved daughter owes her exceeding happiness in a great measure to your munificent gift to us. Mr. Mudford is far too prudent a man to enter into a matrimonial engagement out of the mere levity of love ; and I am persuaded that the knowledge of our fortune had its weight with him in making this offer.

“Mr. Mudford lives in a very handsome villa at Balham ; he has recently lost his

mother, who managed all his domestic affairs ; as you may imagine, his household fell into sad confusion, he was strongly advised by many judicious friends to marry, as lady-housekeepers are very often untrustworthy persons, and indeed, objectionable in many ways, particularly in the case of single gentlemen of a certain age ; this teaches us to behold the directing hand of Providence in all things, and our beloved child has thus been called to fill a station in life, which, I humbly trust the earnest efforts of her parents to endow her with a sound Christian training—thorough evangelical principles, and a useful knowledge of general housekeeping, together with the rudiments of cookery, will enable her to sustain with credit to herself and happiness to her dear husband. My two dear children, I call Mr. Mudford my son now, are both talking together in the room as I write, so pray excuse all blunders. He is perhaps not a very demonstrative lover, but I am glad to say Emily is too sensible to care for

the mere frivolity of courtship. It is all so sweet to a mother's ears ; I can catch a word here and there of their conversation, though they speak in quite a low whisper—they are talking over the plan, God willing, of their future life. Dear William has just told Emily that he always likes to dine punctually at six o'clock ; soup or fish as a rule, an entrée, some sort of joint or poultry, a light pudding or tart ; so you see Emily's prospects are thoroughly satisfactory and solid. I cannot write any more ; tears of joy will come into my eyes. With a thousand blessings for your love and goodness to us all.

“ Your ever grateful and affectionate sister-in-law,

“ MARIA CORLEY.”

“ Emily Corley is going to be married,” Mabel exclaimed to her sister after reading Mrs. Corley's letter.

“ So young,” observed Mary regretfully ; “ poor child, I trust it may prove no bar to her spiritual progress.”

"Mrs. Corley says that Mr. Mudford, her intended husband, is a very religious man."

"I always endeavour to hope for the best," answered Mary, in a tone of despondency; "but men, men," she exclaimed with a sigh, "men are very deceitful in the scales; the religion of intended husbands is oftentimes very different from the religion of married men. I have seen men who were never tired of going to church before marriage, become very lukewarm afterwards."

"Well, come," said Mabel, by way of diversion, "I've made up my mind what I shall give her for a wedding present, her uncle's diamonds."

"I am no advocate for the adornment of our vile bodies," protested Mary, "but still those diamonds are very valuable; they might be sold—the worldlings would wear them in their sin—and the proceeds might be spent in sound curates——"

"They were a gift," rejoined Mabel. "I trust, poor girl, they may make her happier

than they made me. I shall be very happy when they leave my possession."

Mabel had never trusted herself to look at those diamonds from the day of her husband's death. She had deposited them in their case, at the bottom of a very handsome dressing-case which she had never cared to use, one of Mr. Vaughan's many lavish gifts. When she went upstairs to her room, she locked the door to prevent the servant coming in, and opening the dressing case, took out the box containing the diamonds. She involuntarily shuddered as she touched the velvet cover; the first feeling of depression which had beset her since her return to Torquay.

"I won't look at them," she said, "I'll put the case up in paper; Mr. Simeon shall take it when he goes up to town next week." She thought, however, that she might as well assure herself that the diamonds were safe in the box. She touched the spring, the case flew open; yes, there were the diamonds glittering

before her eyes: she quickly averted her head, the sight was too painful. "Thank God;" she cried, with fervour, "all that sorrow, all that anguish of perplexity and doubt has passed away for evermore." Still turning away her face, she closed back the lid, but the spring would not catch; she opened the box to ascertain the cause; a large envelope had fallen down from the top of the lid, where it must have stuck, and lay over the diamonds. There was writing on it, evidently Jacob Vaughan's handwriting; the words were, The *last* will of Jacob Vaughan;" the word "*last*" was underlined. In an instant, the fearful truth flashed into her mind, she had been living in a fool's paradise; this, then, was the realised threat of the dying man, the testament of his undying jealousy and vengeance.

"Not now, oh God, not now!" she gasped, "not now, I say;" she sank into a chair, and, without the power of action, she gazed with a sickening fascination at

the terrible document. "Not now," she pleaded in accents of agony, "it will kill me! Oh, not now! now that I have known what it is to be happy, now that I have striven to make all around me happy; now that I love!" She started up with a shriek, as if a red-hot iron had touched her heart, and then again she sank down helpless into the chair. There lay the envelope, but the handwriting grew dizzy as she gazed upon it. "I must," she muttered, after a long pause of silent agony, "I must read it; give me strength, oh, merciful Lord, give me strength; give me sight to read it; don't leave me now, don't leave me, or I shall go mad." She struggled to regain her self-possession; with hands that trembled violently she grasped the envelope, and, with intense effort, broke the black seal—Jacob Vaughan's crest. She strove to read the document, but the words danced before her eyes: by dint of determined resolution she did read it at last, every word, to the last word, and the

last words contained the strength of Jacob Vaughan's curse, and then she swooned away, holding the document clenched in her hand.

When she recovered her senses, the shadows of evening had drawn in; she heard her mother's voice outside, "Anything wrong, Mabel, dear?"

"It's all right, mother; I was rather tired. I have been lying on the bed; I shall be downstairs presently. Don't wait for tea; you can keep a cup for me."

She rose up from the floor; the fatal document lay at her feet; the clenching of her hand had somewhat crumpled the paper; she carefully smoothed it out, and replaced it in the envelope, and then she turned away with a pitiful cry of anguish, and almost involuntarily sank down on the carpet, helpless in the very agony of her soul. "If I marry again, I am a beggar," she muttered; "they are beggars, without a roof to cover them; the wife and children of Isaac Vaughan are beggars, too, if I

marry. Oh, great God! shall a man do this thing and die; do this horrible thing, which will be the enduring agony of a living being's life; do this cruel thing for the sake of a senseless feeling of miserable jealousy, and then die, the day of repentance gone for ever?" She rose to her feet, and her thoughts turned with bitterness against her late husband. "Look on me, Jacob, from heaven or hell," she cried fiercely, "Look on me, I say, and behold the cruel injustice of your hands. The pain will cling to you as it does to me. There lies the wretched paper; you would give worlds now to tear it up, and be quit of this awful suffering; you would give worlds, if you could, to bid me tear it up, and save you from this agony—save us both from this intolerable suffering. No, alas! the day of revocation is passed for ever, Jacob; this will of yours will be safe in my bosom, next my living flesh, till I deliver it into Mr. Barton's hands." She took up the envelope and placed it care-

fully in her bosom. "It will lie next my heart, with all its mean hate and hideous spite, next my beating heart, full now of holy love, with all its deadly enmity, with its cursed choice of a withered life or beggary; your widow, or married and a beggar; all around me, all who cling to me for comfort and support, for very bread, beggars; or——" and as the terrible thought flashed into her mind, she shrank back with a shudder. "No, no! Oh, merciful God, not that! not this noble love of mine, not this holy gift flung down, degraded! not that awful shame,—not his mistress! Oh God!" she cried in bitter anguish, "not this desecration of that holy thought which sanctified my life, his bride, in the white robe of purity and honour; tear this love from my heart, first; kill me; not that shame, not that turning of Heaven's light into darkness."

Her mother again knocked at the door.

"Mabel, dear, as soon as you can, please. Mary is rather fatigued this evening, and

she would like to see you before she goes up to her room."

"I shall be down directly," Mabel answered. Her mother's summons altered the current of her thoughts. "Oh, Lord," she cried, throwing herself on her knees—"help me now; I have no other help. I am quite alone, good Lord; they all love me deeply; my father, and mother, and Mary, but they can't help me. They don't feel what I feel—my own kindred!—but I am a stranger to their hearts; make me brave and true; in all these engrossing thoughts of self, don't let me forget that *they* must never want for comfort and support, as long as I have the power of helping them; don't let the thought of that first duty ever leave my mind through all this fearful struggle." She rose up, and feeling carefully that the will lay safely in her bosom, went downstairs.

END OF VOL. I.



